石踏一榮
ICHIEI ISHIBUMI
23
ハイスクールD×D
球技大会のジョーカー
ファンタジア文庫

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「旦那さまの
すべてを洗わないと、
良い奥さんになんて
なれそうにない
ですし」
ぴたりぴたりと
朱乃さんが動くたびに
時折、俺の体に朱乃さんの
豊満なおっぱいが、
極上のやわらかさの
女体が、当たるううううっ！

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Life.0

<<—team, [King] has retired. It's the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team's victory.>>

Just as I sent the opposing team's [King] flying backwards, they faded into the light of retirement. The announcement of our victory echoed throughout the entire venue. After the game concluded, we returned to the stadium from the vast field (an aquatic location this time). An ovation of cheers welcomed our return as the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team. A live announcement was then made.

<<It has been decided again—! The victory goes to the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team—! Hyoudou Issei-senshu's ''' team is on a roll! They continue their winning streak!>>

The audience's voices enveloped the entire stadium, culminating into a fanatical whirlpool. We raised our hands up and responded to the audience. The cheers intensified even further, which honestly surprised us. The Rating Game World Tournament that all factions were able to participate in had already been running for more than a month now.

—We had won yet another game, adding to our steady accumulation of wins.

After the game ended, the members of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team returned to the waiting room. After gulping down a supplementary drink in one go, Irina spoke triumphantly

"Fufufu, we're on a winning streak. Our team is full of momentum right now!"

"Perhaps one of the reasons is that we haven't encountered a god-class being's team yet…but we've even defeated the teams of high-class Devils, so we're actually doing very well."

—Rossweisse-san used a towel to wipe her cheek as she calmly replied. Indeed, we had been victorious ever since we first started competing in the World Tournament. Of all the teams that we had fought against so far, some had been below us, while some were professional Rating Game players, and though they weren't easy fights, we had still won until now. …However, it could only be considered luck that we hadn't encountered a team with any god-class beings so far. If we really were to face off against one, victory would be extremely difficult to obtain. No members of the anti-terrorist [DxD] team had encountered a god-class being yet either. If we continued to accumulate wins like this, we would eventually encounter a god-class

being — or perhaps someone on the level of a Maou. Thus it was only sensible for us to continue accumulating wins before that encounter to ensure that we would have a qualifying score. Nonetheless, our team was brimming with vitality and momentum because of this winning streak. So long as our morale was high, our performance improved in correspondence, so it was definitely a gain. Of course, we also have team members like Rossweisse-san who maintain a calm mind. It was actually Xenovia who seemed somewhat gloomy this time. Upon seeing that the joy of victory did not emerge on her friend's face, the surprised Irina asked Xenovia

"Ara, Xenovia? You don't seem to be very happy?"

Xenovia sighed as she responded

"Hmm, I'm pleased about our continuous wins…but based on my experiences, it's very easy for bad things to happen at times like this."

This should be the experience that Xenovia had cultivated when she was a Church warrior — or perhaps it was intuition. Unexpectedly, I can't do anything like that. In fact, there have been times where we've relied on a team member's intuition to escape from a few dilemmas. Ravel nodded in agreement with Xenovia.

"I think that will be the case from now on. In professional Rating Games, it is often the case that new teams rely on strength and morale to maintain their winning streak at the beginning. However, there are many changes that occur once they reach the midpoint."

Everyone's attention was directed towards the strategist Ravel. With a serious expression, Ravel said

"From here on they will start to experience losing streaks. The reason is very simple; no matter how good a team is, the formation of a good strategy will completely stop them as long as another team has done enough research."

Precisely because they were strong, countermeasures were developed. Because we have been so successful thus far, we are bound to become the targets of other teams. …We have definitely been analysed with great depth. It was also uncertain when we would be hit. Perhaps it would be the next match. As we continue to win these matches one by one, there will eventually come a day when….

"Even if it is possible to win, countermeasures can immediately be devised. You can never have too tactical plans, that's what my father said."

—The team's [Pawn] Bova said. His father, Tannin-ossan had also participated in professional Rating Games. He had more or less experienced various things. At this time, even Bina Lessthan-shi[121], who was usually silent, made a rare remark.

"If a tactic is popular, then it will lead to a lot of research, further increasing its popularity, the same thing applies regardless of whether it's a game of Chess or the Devils' Rating Games."

Ravel also nodded in agreement.

"Bina-sama is correct. As a novice team, if we simply rely on momentum, others will develop a counter-strategy which has a high probability of defeating us."

“But, in order to prevent this, we should come up with our own countermeasures, right Ravel?”

To answer Xenovia’s question, Ravel replied with

“Yes.”

“It is only natural. …However, it is regrettable that I am also an amateur. Although I do want to come up with a countermeasure that has no gaps…weaknesses will still be exposed by professionals or god-class beings.”

…It was true that we had already defeated several professional players, but they were not high-ranked opponents. There were several top-ranked players also participating in the World Tournament. Needless to say, they also had many wins. If we were to fight against them, it would certainly be a difficult match. Bina-shi also added

“Creating weak points — such things are also possible. In the past, there was a perfectly synchronised team, but one particular player had a more fragile mind, so when their opponents made a clever counter, the team’s entire balance collapsed.”

Making weak points huh. That is truly quite terrifying. Although I can’t imagine how one would come up with tactics like that, the teams relying on power would surely crumble if they were countered with a clever strategy…. Just as I delved into deep thought as the [King]…. Ravel reacted to what Bina-shi just said.

“Bina-sama, about what you just said, could it be that person—”

Before she could finish her sentence.

“U-Umm.”

There was someone who had appeared to speak to us. —It was a blonde-haired female vampire wearing a red sweater, Elmenhilde. She extended a clipboard towards Ravel.

“I have completed…the record of the game.”

Ravel smiled as she accepted it.

“Thank you. Elemenhilde-sama’s record is always so neat, it’s a great help.”

“Ah no, I was the one who asked in the first place, so I’m willing to do anything.”

Elmenhilde answered respectfully. On the day that the two shocking combinations of my match against Dulio, and Sairaorg-san’s match against Cao Cao were announced, there was a sudden visit to the Hyoudou household — it was the pure-blooded Vampire ojou-sama [131] of the Carmilla faction, Elmenhilde Karnstein. As soon as she arrived, she stated that she wished to join the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team. We were all rather surprised to hear this. I haven’t asked about the details yet, but it seems that she came to visit us regarding the revival of her hometown. But either way, this was an important tournament; it wasn’t possible to incorporate her into our team without a single thought. In order for her to observe the situation, Ravel asked her to record the details of our games for a while. The decision not to add her into the team immediately wasn’t just because of her identity;

it also took into account the dangers of the tournament and the future of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team. More importantly, she was also an agent of the Carmilla Vampire faction. She had to obtain permission in order to leave the country. …But it seems she had already negotiated this in advance. However, suddenly adding in a new member would mean that the team's balance and teamwork had to be reworked again, and our current momentum would halt. So Ravel left her in charge of recording, in hopes that she would be able to witness our activity while she memorised the actions and personalities of each member. …If we forced Elmenhilde in and it ruined our current teamwork, then it would not be worth it. Although I felt sorry for her, it was necessary to slowly get used to her through practice. In fact, she had now joined in with our team's training sessions. I still don't know whether Ravel will include her in our future team composition. Even if I gave approval, Ravel would definitely disagree right now…. If I insisted on her joining, Ravel would probably concede, but even if I did that…. While I gave thought to such matters, I realised that Elmenhilde's former haughty attitude had changed, and she was now rather timid! She seemed to have become rather honest and quiet. Although her naiveté as an ojou-sama was evident in her daily life, her previously condescending attitude and atmosphere had already disappeared. …I guess she became like this because she must have experienced something unforgettable. The Vampire country had been destroyed by Qlippoth, and she was now working hard to rebuild her own country. I thought about Elmenhilde's feelings…and then, I began to reflect on our tournament game. As we continued to chat, Ravel looked at her wristwatch and then said to me

"Ah, it's time. Ise-sama. We'll stop the reflection meeting here, it's time for work."

"Oops, that's right. As a newly appointed [King], I have to take care of those matters."

Indeed, as a high-class Devil, I had also started doing [Devil's jobs]. Between the tournament and Devil's jobs, there was honestly a lot of things to do as a new high-class Devil. We concluded our reflection, and then returned to Kuoh Town. For us, the first great mountain of this tournament was — [Trump Card of Heaven]. There was not much time left until our match against the team of reincarnated Angels that Dulio led.

Notes

1. –senshu is an honorific used to refer to a player or contestant.
2. –shi is a formal honorific used when the speaker is unfamiliar with the person that they are referring to.
3. –ojou-sama is usually used to refer to a noble, high-class young lady.

Life.1
A [King] From Now On

Part I

It was now the end of Spring—.

While the games of the tournament continued in full swing, our work as Devils also began, and our new school life as third-year students was also progressing steadily. Standing upon the podium was the homeroom teacher of the third year's B class — Rossweisse-san.

"In summary, the ball tournament is imminent. We cannot lose this inter-class competition!"

In an energetic manner, Rossweisse-san had become our class' homeroom teacher. In the same class as me, Matsuda and Motohama also grinned as they watched Rossweisse-san.

"Rossweisse-chan, you're so fired up."

"Well, it's her first time taking on the role of a homeroom teacher, so of course she doesn't want to lose."

Matsuda and Motohama were having a discussion beside me. I was also in the third year's B class now. Upon advancing to the third year, my classmates changed again as well. But even so, there weren't any major changes. In addition to Matsuda and Motohama who have always been my classmates, familiar people such as Asia, Xenovia, Irina, and Kiryuu were also present. Aside from our new homeroom teacher, Rossweisse-san, Kiba had also become my classmate. This arrangement was made in consideration of Devil-related events or [DxD]-related events so that we would be able to assemble together immediately. All of the third-year students related to the Gremory household had been gathered in one class. Similarly, the C class included Saji, as well as all of the third-year students of the Sitri household. In any case, I really hope that we'll be able to have peace and quiet until we graduate! I turned around to speak to Kiba who was sitting behind me.

"Regardless of whether it's the inter-class competition or club activities, we can't lose either, especially as the new Occult Research Club."

"Indeed. If we lose this year, we won't be able to live up to the expectations of the graduates."

Kiba replied enthusiastically. His style of speech was very becoming of a vice-president, but in response to his words, I burst out in laughter.

"W-What is it?"

Seeing me laugh, Kiba looked puzzled.

"Hehe, I was just thinking about the ball game tournament last year."

Due to the Holy Sword Incident, Kiba had become quite distraught. Back then, his mind was completely preoccupied during the ball tournament. When Kiba remembered how he acted at that time, his face suddenly became red.

“…Don’t mention it, Ise-kun.”

At a nearby table, Xenovia apologetically said

“I’m sorry. I’ll have to participate as a member of the Student Council team.”

Although Xenovia was a member of the Occult Research Club, she was also the current Student Council President. Since that was the case, it was understandable. It would not be justifiable if she did not participate in the ball game tournament as a member of the Student Council. Irina did a thumbs-up in front of Xenovia while she said

“No problem at all! I’ll just defeat Xenovia and the others!”

After a brief pause of silence, Xenovia responded to Irina’s challenge.

“Well, then Irina is the only one that we have to defeat thoroughly.”

“What did you say!?”

Ah, sparks flew out as the two of them bashed their heads against each other. It was also a year ago when I had met them. I never would have imagined that they would become my classmates after a year, let alone one of them becoming the Student Council President. When we first met, we had been enemies with each other…. Life is truly unpredictable huh.

“Well, if we’re going up against each other, then let’s decide the winner fair and square.”

I said as I watched Xenovia and Irina.

“…That’s right, we won’t lose.”

Asia quietly chimed in. Somehow, it felt as though she was a forceful person. Like someone who would charge into a dead end, as both her voice and expression became rather stiff…. Kiryuu rubbed Asia’s cheek and asked with worry

“Asia, you’re acting a little strange right now, is everything okay?”

“L-Leth’s go! W-We won’t be deheated!!!!!”

Wait…. Isn’t that rather strange? Speaking of which, she seems to have a rather pensive expression both at home and at school lately. She’s always the last person to leave our club room after activities as well….

“…That’s right, because I’m Buchou.”

—Just like that, Asia seemed to whisper to herself.

“”……””

Xenovia and Irina who were originally locked in an argument now also looked at Asia with worry.

“Listen up. We can do this, B class! Let’s aim for victory!”

[Yeah~~]

The lone sound of Rossweisse-san’s enthralled voice was accompanied by the voices of a group of unmotivated students as they echoed throughout the classroom —.

Part 2

Whilst living the life of a third-year high school student, there was also another new type of ‘work’ that was very important to me. Our [Hyoudou Issei peerage] had finally begun its own business. Business — this obviously meant our jobs as Devils. It was the same as when we used to work under Rias' command where we listened to the wishes of our clients, and after fulfilment we would receive equivalent remuneration; it was the Devils’ job that had continued on since ancient times. Since I had now become a high-class Devil and was a [King], I had to lead Asia and the others in my peerage to perform their jobs well as the [Hyoudou Issei peerage]. From a corporate perspective, I was currently the president of [Hyoudou Issei Co., Ltd.]. And to be more specific, I was a ‘manager of a branch store in the Gremory Large Enterprise’. …Speaking of which, there has never been such a precedent of rising to the rank of a high-class Devil in only a year, moreover, I have only been in the service of my master for one year, which is an exceptionally short period of time. That has led to the current situation in which I am unprepared. If I had worked hard under my master for decades, or hundreds of years, and then was told “you might rise to become a high-class Devil in a few years”, then I would have been prepared to become independent. I now have to direct this business after just a year, something that I would not have been able to comprehend a year ago when I was still obsessed with the dream of “I want to become a harem king!”. However, the usually gentle Rias was incredibly strict at times like this.

“Just try it. Having become a high-class Devil after just one year, this is nothing compared to the battle against Qlippoth.”

—She gave me a Spartan[121] education!

At the end of all that, one-third of the territory of work that belonged to the Rias Gremory peerage was handed over to me. …After all, for someone who had just become a Devil one year ago, ‘Promotion to a high-class Devil!’ -> ‘Preparation for independence’ + ‘Territory confirmation’ -> ‘Beginning of work!’ was too much to process for me in that brief amount of time! When I became a ‘branch manager of the Gremory Large Enterprise’, it was needless to say that the branch — the workplace was also provided to me. My workplace was one of the labs that Azazel-sensei had set up in Kuoh Town. After setting out from the Hyoudou residence on foot for about ten minutes, it would be possible to see a certain private cram school, and our workplace was below it. The cram school had been bought by the Grigori, and a basement had been built below it. It was then transferred to me. The cram school’s elevators had special recognition systems so that only relevant personnel could proceed to the basement. Once our club activities ended each day, my peerage and I would go to that cram school until evening. We would then take the elevator to the basement together.

“I’m still not used to taking the elevator to work.”

I also agreed with Xenovia’s opinion. After descending in the elevator, a rather long corridor greeted us. There was one door directly in front of us, three doors to our right, and two on our left, a total of six doors. The rooms on the right side starting from the one closest to the elevator was the shower room, followed by the male and

female toilets. On the left side starting from the elevator was the storage room, followed by the lounge which was equipped with a kitchenette. The most important of them all was the room directly in front, which was the office. The sign on the door also said [Hyoudou Issei Household Office]. The room was quite spacious and its size was around thirty tatami mats [131] large. There were several desks inside, on top of which were documents and computers, while file cabinets stood on the side along with a fax machine and a sofa for guests. All of the bare necessities had been arranged. Of course, space had also been prepared for a magic circle which would be needed when performing Devil jobs. Anyway, although it had just been established and was slightly lacking, it did have the appearance of an office. I walked into the office and went towards the largest, innermost executive desk — the president's desk. …It could be considered to be a desk fit for a [King]. I did say that an ordinary office desk was fine, but it was Ravel who rebutted me saying

"That cannot do!"

So she procured this desk and chair for me that was able to display the impression of a [King]. …Asia also had much difficulty in getting used to the buchou's desk of the Occult Research Club, and now I could relate. Isn't this a bit disproportionate to myself? —I often think so! After Asia, Xenovia, Ravel, and Rossweisse-san put down their respective belongings at their own desks, we began to work. Ravel was my manager, and also the vice-president. After arriving at the office, the first thing we did was confirm the number of requests we had through a magic circle. Asia sat at her own desk and awaited Ravel's instructions. Xenovia was relaxing in her own seat, while Rossweisse-san made the leaflets that would summon us. I also sat at the president's desk, quietly waiting for Ravel's report. …Our work had just begun after all, so documents, files, and the like had not yet piled up into a mountain…. It felt somewhat disappointing at the moment. After the end of Ravel's confirmation, we allocated the requests of our clients among ourselves. The requests for healing were given to Asia, those for physical activity were given to Xenovia, and the requests requiring magic were given to Rossweisse-san to deal with. Of course, erotic requests do not exist! These are my precious peerage members, so how could I possibly allow such things!? They do not exist! After seeing Ravel return to sit down at her own desk, I said

"Well, let's work hard today as well!"

My words were the signal for the start of today's business

""""Yes!""""

"Yeah!"

Asia, Ravel, and Rossweisse-san responded with 'Yes', while Xenovia responded with 'Yeah' as business officially began. Ravel immediately reported on the allocation of work to us.

"—This is the schedule for this evening. So, I leave it up to all of you then."

After Ravel's report ended, my peerage members travelled via magic circle to the clients who had made a request to us through the leaflets. My job was to see them off, and after waiting for them to return, I would listen to their report and record it into a document. Rias also performed the same work as a [King]. Ravel was basically our

bookkeeper, but she would occasionally respond to requests and travel to the clients' side. I would also go out for a job at times. Relying on Asia and the others was sufficient most of the time, but I was still responsible for my old regular customers whom I looked after when I worked under Rias, such as Morisawa-san and Mil-tan. Even now, I still received instructions such as 'ride a bicycle over'. Even after becoming a [King], I still had to ride a bicycle over to my customers. After all, since I had only been a Devil for a year, one could insist that I was still an apprentice. It had nothing to do with my own position, it was simply important not to forget my roots. Indeed, although this was supposedly a branch of a larger business, we were still working within Rias' territory, so we had to maintain contact in order to prevent a job clash. This was the same for the branch and the main store. Of course, there were also jobs that we received from Rias. This was roughly the feel that my 'Devils' job' had. …It was necessary to be careful when working so as not to make any mistakes. After all, I wasn't currently considered to be completely independent of Rias. She had simply entrusted one-third of the territory that she controlled to me. …In the near future, I would also receive my own territory. I would then continue my business there. By then, it probably wouldn't be Kuoh Town. It might be somewhere very close to here. However, there was also the possibility that it would be very far from here. In order to obtain my own territory in the human world, it was first necessary to gain the approval of the Underworld's government and the Gremory family, as well as approval from my master Rias. After various judgements from above, a piece of territory would be prepared and assigned to me…the process was supposed to be something like that. I do wonder how much longer it will take before I obtain my own territory. …I really hope that I won't be told that my territory is ready while I'm still unprepared. In terms of when, I hope to still live in Kuoh Town until I graduate from university. But, if the order comes from the higher-ups, it wouldn't be good for me to complain…. From time to time, I feel uneasy about the changes that the future may bring. Just as I was immersed in such thoughts, someone called out to me.

"O [King], please have some coffee."

"Ah, thank you Bova."

The one who brought me coffee was — Bova Tannin. Bova (mini-dragon form) was also assisting here. He was tentatively considered as one of my retainers, so he was assisting me and my peerage from the sidelines. During our Devil jobs, he always puts me and my peerage first and also pays attention to the small details all the time. If there is a shortage of materials, he'll immediately replenish the supply, and he also brings refreshments back for us. …Known as 'Bova the Destroyer' in the Underworld, he was now simply a dragon working diligently. Ravel had told me that while he was in the Underworld, Bova constantly sought powerful opponents to fight against. He particularly despised being compared to his own father or elder brothers. …Since Bova had not mentioned any of that to me up until now, I didn't ask about it. I could also more or less understand based on the information. The eldest son of Tannin-ossan was well-versed in civil and military affairs and gained the support of the people. This was while the second son became well-known as a researcher in the Underworld. He normally worked in human form at a specialised agency in the Maou's territory. Ravel said that Bova felt a sense of inferiority towards his own father and elder brothers…. I don't have any siblings, and my own father is an ordinary human, so I naturally didn't feel inferior to any family members…. I guess I should say that I'm lucky. However, what I care about is — Bova looked up to me

and was determined to become one of my retainers. I still haven't asked him about it even now. Regardless of the identity of my retainer, not asking felt as though it was unfitting of the behaviour of a [King]….

"What is it about me that you respect so deeply?"

I could ask like that, but I wasn't the kind of person who would arrogantly say that. If I really did ask like that, Bova would answer me…. For now, I was letting things be and waiting for the next opportunity to ask. I was currently still in the process of training and searching for new peerage members and participants for the Tournament so that opportunity shouldn't be too far off…. As I thought about my first retainer, I continued to work. A few hours later—. The first person to return via the magic circle was Xenovia. She also held her remuneration in hand.

"I'm back. The client gave me an antique clock that had been a decoration. Ise, Ravel, I'm giving it to you for appraisal."

Ravel received it and began to check on its value.

"Thanks for your work. It looks like…it is quite old. To be sure, I'll give this to the professional appraisers."

Although there were special machines which were able to measure the value of a payment, it was only to a certain extent, so it was necessary to contact professional appraisers for an accurate measurement. At least, that was what the Gremory family did. After a while, Rossweisse-san also returned.

"I'm also back. From the looks of it, mine appears to be a relatively rare piece of game software…"

Ravel began to check the payment that Rossweisse-san had received.

"Thanks for your work, Rossweisse-sama. Hmm, we'll also give this to the professional appraisers. Yes, Ise-sama, would you like to take a look?"

Since she knew that I was interested in the game software, Ravel asked me. I was actually quite interested in it, so I immediately went to look at the payment that Rossweisse-san received. …It was actually a slightly famous game from my childhood.

"Ah, this game. It certainly is quite rare. But let's hand it over to the appraisers first."

I thus decided. This was the type of payment that could be directly given to my peerage, but the payments received by the Gremory peerage all went directly to the Gremory family's warehouse. I also followed this, and sent all remuneration back to the main Gremory warehouse. Afterwards, the confirmed monetary value would be transferred into the [Hyoudou Issei Peerage] bank account. I wasn't sure if other Devil families operated their businesses in the same manner, but our side — the Gremory peerage also followed this system. Indeed, the operating costs of this office came out of the accumulated funds of my previous Devil jobs and also the royalties received as the 'Oppai Dragon'. Since the amount was so vast, Grayfia-san managed them on my behalf. And now it had finally been released, so even all the furniture was purchased with my own money. …It was a strange feeling. Incidentally, after looking at the bank account that I had not seen for a long time, the balance

appeared to be an astronomical figure…. Well, if any of my peerage members are caught up in an emergency, I'll have an excess available to be able to protect them. Just as I was thinking that, radiant light erupted from the magic circle for the third time, and Asia returned.

"…I'm back now."

The French doll that she was hugging was probably her remuneration…. But Asia was clearly thinking about something with a blank expression.

"Thank you for your work, Asia-sama."

Ravel wanted to receive the payment from her…but Asia didn't seem to notice and she walked straight ahead.

"Asia-sama, Asia-sama! Please give me the client's payment!"

Ravel called out to Asia.

"Ah! S-Sorry! I forgot about it! P-Please take it!"

Asia finally came back to her senses and quickly gave the doll to Ravel.

"Asia is as careless as always."

When I said that…Xenovia looked at Asia with concern for a friend. Everyone had returned so they each went off to rest for a while. Ravel came over to my side and quietly said to me

(Umm, Ise-sama.)

"Hmm? What is it?"

(There's something I want to talk to you about regarding Asia-sama…)

…It seemed like something which was inconvenient to speak about here. I took Ravel away from the office, and arrived at the storeroom where we began our private discussion. The first thing that Ravel said was

"Umm, I don't know where I should start…there is a questionnaire from a customer regarding Asia-sama…"

Ravel showed me the questionnaire. After a request, the questionnaires that clients filled out was extremely valuable information. I directed my attention towards the questionnaire. …The questionnaire outlined Asia's job at the time. I looked at the questionnaire as I said

"Hmm, I see. They thought that Asia seemed to act strangely."

Indeed, the questionnaire stated that Asia seemed to contemplate something rather deeply after taking on the request, that she did not seem her usual self, and that her desire to accept impossible requests had led to failure. This was clearly different from the questionnaires that Asia usually received. Ravel also worriedly said

"It's not dissatisfaction that's coming from the customers, but worry…so I think that this matter should not be spoken about with Asia-sama directly…"

Indeed, talking to Asia about this would only make her even more concerned, making the situation worse, and it was possible that she would even become depressed. While her original request itself was complete, the result wasn't too bad, but…. For the time being, the client was rather worried about Asia, so they were somewhat wary of calling her again…. But the fact that even Asia's clients were worried about her made me feel relieved.

"She might be overexerting herself. It's always like that during our club activities as well."

Indeed, regardless of whether she was at home, or at the Occult Research Club, she would always enter a strange state on her own. When the Ball Game Tournament was mentioned, it was as if she had been possessed by a ghost.

"We won't lose!"

"We'll definitely win!"

That kind of aura didn't suit Asia's usual self. …Lately, as the buchou of the Occult Research Club, she'd been going too far in trying to act brave and overexert herself. Ravel placed her hand over her cheek in thought as she said with a troubled expression

"Could she be confused about the new environment…perhaps I should adjust our schedule…but if I say to Asia-sama that there's no need to work hard or do her best, then she may actually feel hurt by that…"

Asia was Ravel's senior at school, so there were some things that Ravel probably found difficult to talk about.

"Perhaps Asia is pondering about what she should be doing as the buchou, and what our club activities should be like."

I quietly said. I believed that to be the most likely reason. Regarding this point, it was necessary for Asia to overcome that on her own…having said that, my adorable Asia-chan was currently troubled, so I couldn't ignore that! I didn't mean to say that I wouldn't help Asia, but as the current Occult Research Club vice-president Kiba, as well as Xenovia, Irina and former president Rias have said, we want Asia to grow on her own. The most important thing was for Asia to grow on her own. It was also through this process that I awakened my own power, after being asked to behave as a 'Sekiryuutei' would. I had faced failure and bitterness. However, I had already become a 'Sekiryuutei' of my own making now. Asia was still being asked to be the 'buchou' right now, and was in the process of trying to change herself. However, even if being like Rias was her goal, it was not possible for her to be called Rias. Asia was Asia. I hoped that she would be able to become a 'buchou' of her own making. It had to be like that. Just as Asia had always supported me until now, it was now my turn to support her. —So, I had to find an opportunity to have a good talk with Asia. Xenovia and Irina should have noticed, so I'll let them talk to her first. …I turned my head sideways again. Hmm, ever since I became [King], there have been many more things that I have to worry about. I reminisced about how I was a year ago when I acted based on my ero ambitions

"My aim is to become a harem king! To be surrounded by oppai and dreams!"

No, I still want that even now! My aim is still to become a harem king! But as my own position changes, the things that I have to consider naturally increase. …This is the so-called promotion to a high-class Devil. Ravel smiled as she looked at my troubled expression.

“Worrying about your peerage members is also part of a high-class Devil’s job. If the [King] does not worry, then other problems will arise.”

I naturally wouldn’t become that kind of [King]. No matter if it’s Asia or Ravel, all of you are finally by my side, so I’ll definitely do my best for you.

“For Asia’s sake, let’s all work together to help her. So, we’ll tell everyone about this soon.”

“I understand.”

After gaining Ravel’s approval, our private discussion was over. Ah, it’s so helpful that Ravel is such a capable manager. But, I’ll never be able to lift my head to her for as long as I live if that’s the case…. The two of us came out from the storeroom and into the corridor, where Xenovia was delightfully feasting on some snacks.

“Are you done with your shameless acts in the storeroom? So you actually thought of using that place, Ravel.”

She actually let such words out of her mouth! Both Ravel and I couldn’t help blushing!

“I-Idiot! How could Ravel and I do that…!”

With a bright red face, Rossweisse-san said

“Ecchi things while at work!? Does this workplace permit such frivolous attitudes!?”

Asia also chimed in on this topic and became rather emotional!

“Ise-san! Couldn’t you do it at home!? I-If you do this, then I won’t know where I’ll……with Ise-san[141]…”

Of course, I think these things are better done at home! Speaking of which, please stop surprising me with that doorknob! I would feel much happier if you could inform me in advance!

“I see, so it’s also possible to use the storeroom. This was an oversight of mine.”

Ravel-chan!? Y-You aren’t thinking of using the storeroom for anything strange, right!? For some reason, Bova began to cry.

“Even during work, my [King] doesn’t forget about skin-ship with his servants! I am deeply moved!”

Both my peerage members and retainer are the same! Because I’m always such a pervert, they’ve become so tolerant of it!? But, the storeroom huh…. It’s certainly possible! N-No! There is a lounge room after all, so if possible, I could start with Asia-chan, Xenovia, Ravel, and Rossweisse-san—.

[Ise-san…please grant me the mercy of a [King]…]

[Come on, let me give birth to the child of the [King]!]

[…As your manager, please allow me to manage you even further.]

[…T-This is a neglection of duty! B-But, occasional workplace romance is also good…]

…Fufu! When I think about it like that, isn't this the best workplace!? Yes, this is the castle that belongs only to me! Being manager and president, it's truly amazing! Azazel-sensei! This is the laboratory that sensei left behind! I will broaden its role, making it even more erotic to make good use of it! Just as I was immersed in such erotic delusions

"T-Tea is ready."

Someone brought tea out on a tray from the kitchenette. —It was Elmenhilde. She was also wearing Kuoh Academy's girls' uniform today. It was because a matching uniform was more convenient when she was with us. With a doll-like appearance and a slender figure, when she wore this familiar uniform, there was a special sense of freshness. Elemenhilde was currently helping us with our work as well. As for the reason, it was because she didn't want to stay at the Hyoudou residence without helping with anything at all. Indeed, she decided to live at the Hyoudou residence as well. Well, a girl from the supernatural side living with us was no longer a strange thing. She insisted that she had to help with something since she was staying at the Hyoudou residence, so she came here to help us in organising information and to bring us refreshments and so on. She wasn't a Day-walker who could stand being out under the sun like Gasper and Valerie, so she normally wore a cloak in order to minimise her skin's degree of exposure. But it was evening now after all, so wearing the school uniform wasn't a problem. …Vampires with mixed blood could stand under the sun, but those with pure blood could not, which seemed somewhat complicated…perhaps it was because they were closer to the True Ancestor? Needless to say, the room that she stayed in was also underground. She basically wouldn't come up during the daytime on weekends. Although it wasn't as if she'd perish as soon as she faced sunlight, her strength would be greatly reduced…. If I asked the Grigori, it would be possible to find a solution — they would probably help me develop it. Perhaps I should discuss it with them next time. Elemenhilde held the tray up while she poured tea for everyone.

"Ah, thank you, Elmenhilde — ah, be careful!"

I couldn't help calling out when I saw Elmenhilde's movements. Elmenhilde wasn't good at this kind of thing, and the tray was shaking despite the fact that she was trying to walk carefully this time. It was like this every time. Leaving aside her tea brewing skills, Elmenhilde was born as an ojou-sama with no experience in serving tea, so this was a considerably difficult task for her.

Despite this, she still tried to maintain her pride and offer us her sincerity.

“S-Something like this is no big deal…! Waaaaaah!”

—Immediately after saying that, she tripped, and we all anticipated that the tea would come crashing down to the floor! But in that instant — out of empty space, Xenovia drew the holy sword Excalibur.

“Kuh!”

I thanked the holy sword that she held — as the teacups and tray that had been tossed into the air had halted in mid-air. Xenovia slowly moved the sword. In

response, the tray and cups turned upright again, and finally landed on the table safely. Xenovia returned the holy sword to its alternate dimension and then exhaled.

“Phew, it’s great that it didn’t end up falling.”

“I-I’m sorry…”

Elmenhilde apologised sincerely.

“Xenovia, could that have been the power of Ruler just now?”

Upon seeing the ability that Xenovia just displayed, I asked that question. Xenovia nodded.

“Yeah, if it’s something of this degree then it’s more or less possible. It was successful, but”

Xenovia had been studying the power of the holy swords that had been fused into one — how to use the seven abilities with ease. For reasons of compatibility, it was difficult to master the abilities that she was weak with. The ability of ‘Ruler’ was clearly the most difficult to master…but she was already able to use it so well…. Xenovia turned her gaze towards Ravel, and she couldn’t help but smile wryly.

“Our [Bishop]-sama gave me a very strict training menu.”

Ravel then replied

“If all the conditions are met, you might be successful, and even if you can only use a small part of it, it will still become a weapon for us. That’s why I gave Xenovia-sama an important training menu.”

Ravel’s special menu huh. In fact, she also gave me one. Speaking of which, Ravel has given almost all of our team members a ‘new hand’ to try. Ravel is able to think of some truly extraordinary things. I never imagined that she could also have thought about that kind of method, and she came to discuss it with me. If we can make it a reality, it’ll certainly shock everyone. After Elmenhilde safely poured tea for everyone, I sat down and let out a deep breath. After Xenovia had a sip of the tea, she said

“You’re not good at pouring tea? Though, someone like me who only knows how to fight and eat has no right to say that huh.”

Elmenhilde humbly replied

“…A-At home, it is done by servants, so…”

I knew it was like that. Devils were the same, the upper class basically delegated all of their menial tasks to their servants. Ravel sipped her tea as she nodded in agreement.

“They are aristocracy after all, so it’s understandable.”

“But, don’t you also make desserts Ravel?”

I said. Even if Ravel was raised as a noble, she was very good at baking. Occasionally, she also took the time to bake cakes for us. It’d be a worthy contest against Kiba’s cheesecake, and Kiba’s cheesecakes are quite incredible. Ravel

continued

“There are many noble girls in the Underworld who are interested in cooking, you know?”

“That’s certainly true I suppose. Rias and Sona-senpai also cook.”

Rias always cooks for me at home, and former president Sona…could also be regarded as someone who cooks. I never expected that the Devil onee-samas around me were able to take care of their daily lives even without servants around them. Elmenhilde then said

“……I will learn!”

Perhaps because her pride had been shattered, she answered rather enthusiastically. Xenovia continued

“Compared to that, it feels as though Elmenhilde has tripped in places where there are no obstacles. This goes beyond Asia as well.”

Ah, indeed. Putting it that way, Elmenhilde always trips over anything. Perhaps her degree of carelessness is above that of Asia.

“…That is!”

Elmenhilde originally wanted to protest, but her voice dissipated halfway through.

“…Please watch my performance from now on.”

…It seems she understands what she wants to do. Her attitude when we first met was haughty and aggressive, typical of a pure-blooded vampire…I never expected to see such a surprising side to her. …It seems there are things that I wouldn’t have seen if we weren’t living together. Whilst we continued chatting in this manner, we continued our work. As the end of business approached, Ravel looked at the time as she said to me

“Ise-sama, it’s almost time. After this—”

“Yeah, I know.”

Indeed, we also had a meeting scheduled for today. The people we were going to meet were — Dulio’s [Brave Saints] team that we would face in our match at a later date. We were going to meet the [Trump Card of Heaven][151].

Part 3

The place where we would meet the [Joker of Heaven] was — the Hyoudou residence. In fact, choosing to meet at a church-related facility was not a bad idea either, but we were mutually understanding of each other, so we were unable to decide on the meeting place until it was quite late. So we simply chose one of the meeting places of [DxD], which also happened to be the Hyoudou residence. To speak of a reason to meet…it was an opportunity for us to meet and greet the main force of the [Brave Saints] whom we had not been introduced to yet before the match. The Gremory peerage and Rias' team members were originally going to join us, but Rias coincidentally also had a match, so they were training until late at night. Rias had her own circumstances to take care of, so they would have to wait until next time to meet the main force of the [Brave Saints]. To sum up, only the Hyoudou Issei peerage, the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team, and Dulio's team were meeting. They arrived here through the underground magic circle and were then welcomed upstairs to the Hyoudou residence's VIP room. The two groups split up and sat across from each other at the long table. I sat on one side, facing the other [King] — Dulio sat opposite me. The person sitting beside me was not my [Queen], it was Ravel. My team did have a [Queen], but I did not yet have a [Queen] in my own peerage. By the way, my [Queen] Bina-shi was present this time. Under usual circumstances, she wouldn't appear unless the entire team was training. …After all, as someone who knew of her true identity, I also knew that it was not easy for her to be here. Bina sat upright so as not to draw attention to herself…but she still wore a mask, so she became the centre of attention even more. The members of the two teams then began to give self-introductions. However, not all members of the other team were present. It appeared as though the only people who had come were the Aces of the Four Great Seraphim who acted as representatives. In addition, the supervisor of the [Joker of Heaven] team would also be here…. They were different from us as they hired someone to fulfil the role of supervisor. There was nothing wrong with this according to the rules. Professional Rating Games also allowed supervisors to be hired. However, in the majority of professional Rating Games, the [King] personally commanded rather than the supervisor. The role of the supervisor was something that I only found out about afterwards, and the teams who hired a supervisor were a small minority. Moreover, in professional Rating Games, most of them were arrogant nobles who would say things such as

"I don't need any kind of supervisor! I'm more than enough to command!"

The concept of appointing a supervisor was not prevalent because the total number of players was not particularly large. This was one of the reasons that Rias told me. The other major reason was because Devils naturally had long lifespans, so the age of their bodies wouldn't put an end their careers, and thus they remained active players for their entire lives. After all, since they could be active for their entire lives, it was understandable that there weren't any players who would retire to become a supervisor. …Perhaps this was also a problem of the Rating Games. With that in mind, the organisers of the World Tournament had yet to formulate rules on the supervisory position. In actuality, many participating teams aside from the Devils had appointed their own supervisor. The [Joker of Heaven] was the same, and they had recruited a certain famous Rating Game player into their team. Perhaps because of

this, our teams were alike in that we were on a winning streak. …Although we had not yet faced a team with god-class beings, they had been victorious against teams composed of so-called monsters from various mythologies. Their supervisor was also a very famous person that we knew of, and we were quite surprised the first time that we heard about it. Ravel was highly vigilant of them. Their supervisor…it seemed like they would be late. So we began our self-introductions first. Ravel made a suggestion to us before the meeting.

“Ise-sama, everyone, this meeting may become an opportunity to reconsider our strategy. Underneath the peaceful surface of the meeting, you could say that we’ve already begun to spy on each other’s intelligence. After all, our opponent’s supervisor is that person.”

Though Irina retorted

“Really, this is simply a greeting with some Angels. It won’t become something that drastic.”

Although that was what she said…. It was impossible to ignore Ravel’s advice, so we tentatively kept our guard up. But just as Irina had said, they were comrades who had fought against Qlippoth with us; it seemed quite impossible given that it was Dulio, Sister Griselda, and the members of the [Brave Saints]. We introduced ourselves first.

“Uh, I’m the [King] of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team, Hyoudou Issei—”

In roughly the same manner, the self-introductions of our side started with me and then concluded. It was now time for the [Brave Saints] to introduce themselves. I more or less recognised them because we commonly received reports from the Aces and other important members during the battle against Qlippoth. Irina stood up. She was a member of the [Brave Saints] herself, and was Michael-sama’s Ace. But this meeting was in accordance to the teams in the World Tournament, so she was sitting on our side. Irina extended her hand to introduce us to the members of the [Joker of Heaven].

“Ise-kun, these are the main members of the [Brave Saints]—”

“We are the [Joker of Heaven] team, Ise-kun.”

After that, Irina then mentioned the opposing side’s captain — also a [King], it was Dulio who sat opposite me. The reincarnated Angels then began to introduce themselves. The next person who stood up was a tall, black-haired man whose beard seemed to complement the deep features of his face. He wore a priest’s clothes, though his solid physique was also evident…I remembered that he was German. Based on our information, he was roughly thirty years old. He turned the back of his hand towards us, allowing us to see the letter ‘A’ emerge on top of it.

“It’s nice to meet you all. I am Diethelm Waldseemüller. I am Raphael-sama’s [Ace]. Let us be acquainted from now on.”

His demeanour and manner of speech was reminiscent of a gentleman’s. Asia seemed rather concerned about Diethelm. The reason for that was his ability — due to his Sacred Gear. Diethelm didn’t notice Asia’s gaze, and smiled gently.

“Sister Asia. I have heard that you possess a similar ability to my own, I wanted to meet you at least once.”

“Y-Yes! The same goes for me!”

—Asia nervously replied. Indeed, according to our intelligence, Diethelm’s Sacred Gear had the ability of recovery. However, it differed from Asia’s as it could not be used on simply anyone, rather, it could only be used on believers — in other words, it was limited to people from Heaven. Precisely because its recovery had limitations, it didn’t cause harm to the Sacred Gear System, and thus wouldn’t result in exile like Asia’s did…. But I still hoped that changes could be made to the Sacred Gear System. The next reincarnated Angel — who stood up rather energetically, was a priest who appeared to be similar in age to us. His most distinctive trait was his spiky golden hair.

“I am Nero! Nero Raimondi! I am Uriel-sama’s [Ace]! My hobby is helping those in need! I’m good at exterminating Devils and vampires!”

—There was no uncertainty in his hearty and loud declaration! It didn’t feel sarcastic or hateful, perhaps he was simply a very direct person. Beside him, Diethelm frowned as he said

“…Nero, what exactly are you saying in front of others?”

Despite being criticised by his elder, he didn’t seem concerned as he simply placed his hands on his waist and boldly laughed

“Hahahahahaha! Don’t worry about the small things, mister Diethelm! There’s no reason to be too concerned with everyone! To put it simply, I’m skilled at exterminating evil things, so please keep that in mind!”

The young priest — Nero turned his face towards Xenovia and extended his hand.

“Yo, Xenovia! Long time no see!”

“…Yeah, you look as energetic as always.”

Xenovia’s acquaintance? It wouldn’t be surprising if they had met when she was a warrior of the Church. Based on his name, he was probably an Italian. Upon being greeted, Xenovia sighed.

“Do you know each other?”

I asked.

“Well, I suppose. If you reported directly to the Vatican, then you would recognise Dulio Gesualdo and this guy even if you didn’t want to.”

As talented warriors, they probably would have heard about each other within the organisation, and it was also possible for them to have met each other. Nero, who was in particularly high spirits took something out from his pocket. —It was a heroic mask.

“This is [Captain Angel]! He won’t back down no matter what difficulties he faces, he is the righteous friend of children! This is my other identity! I would very much like to have a contest against the [Chichiryuutei Oppai Dragon]…no, I wish to perform with

you on the same stage!”

Captain Angel…I had seen him several times in the tournament so far. Heaven was also trying its hand at hero-themed shows. Irina said

“I may have said this before, but after Heaven heard about Ise-kun’s [Oppai Dragon], they thought that the production of a hero for their believers was also a good idea. So at that time, Nero put his hand up for the role.”

Dulio also added

“I don’t mean to flatter, but he is very popular with the children on our side.”

“Dulio! You should exaggerate more at times like this! The goal is the [Oppai Dragon]! And to surpass the [Oppai Dragon]! So please tell that to the [Oppai Dragon]!”

Nero declared to me. Being overwhelmed by his presence, I could only squeeze out

“Ah, alright.”

H-He’s really quite a boisterous person. Xenovia also sighed because she couldn’t stand how gaudy he was. Xenovia was also a straightforward person…but someone like Nero who acted like this from beginning to end was a little annoying. The one after the enthusiastic young priest was — a beautiful young woman who wore a sister’s black uniform! The woman that I had taken great notice of since a moment ago! Like Nero, she was similar in age to us. I also knew the sister’s name, I remembered that it should be Mirana! She was Russian! She had grey eyes with a hint of blue, they were quite mesmerising. Because it was her turn now, her face became slightly red, and she introduced herself in a somewhat shy manner.

“…I am Mirana Shatarova…Gabriel-sama’s [Ace]. …I am a sestra of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nice to meet you…”

…Aaaaaaahhhh, even her voice is super adorable…! She’s the [Ace] of Gabriel-san who represents absolute justice! This kind of cute girl is the best! Russian fairies truly do exist! To digress, the word ‘sestra’ means sister in the Russian Orthodox Church. However, hehehe…I heard rumours that all of the members of Gabriel-san’s [Brave Saints] are female! Regardless of whether it’s her Queen Griselda-san, or the Ace Mirana-san in front of me, all of them are beautiful women and girls! How wonderful! By all means, I’d like to get acquainted with them! While I became excited on the inside, Dulio’s words pushed me even further.

“On that topic, Mirana has a very impressive bust, and she’s also quite famous among the female reincarnated Angels.”

—What! Upon hearing such outrageous news, my eyes instantly homed into Mirana-san’s breasts! The sister’s uniform was able to hide her body so I was unable to see it clearly…damn it! It’s such a shame that I couldn’t learn Motohama’s technique. Because of all the villains who have been attacking us, coupled with all the changes around me, I was never able to master Motohama’s technique!

“Ahh.”

Mirana-san let out an adorable sound to complain, and she covered her chest with

both hands at the same time. Based on that reaction, it didn't seem like she was angry, rather, she was just incredibly shy! That reaction is certainly new to me! This kind of shy reaction where she's not sure what to do is something I haven't seen in far too long! All of the girls in my house are very open, so that was naturally good. But as a man, this pure reaction was also rather delightful…!

"Dulio, this is sexual harassment you know?"

Griselda-san interrupted from the side. …At that time, I felt someone's eyes on me. Turning to follow look—.

"……"

It was an adorable pouting Asia-chan! It was possible to read 'I'm also a sister' from her expression! Alright, I get it, I get it! Asia, I understand! But most of the sisters with special abilities that I meet are beautiful women! Xenovia suddenly interrupted

"Hmm! Could it be that this is the Joker team's strategy!? To tell Ise that Sister Mirana has enormous breasts, so that Ise won't be able to concentrate during the match!?"

After hearing that, Dulio began to laugh loudly.

"Ahahaha! I see! This was certainly a blind spot! Well then, I'll have to incorporate Mirana's breasts into my strategy."

Mirana-san's face became an even brighter shade of red! However, she shyly said

"…I-If m-my breasts can contribute to our team's victory…then I am willing to offer…"

It takes such courage to say those words! W-Will you really offer them!? Will you really incorporate those breasts into your strategy!? That's very bad! Seriously bad! I'll definitely fall for it! I'll definitely take the bait! If I was still a [Pawn], would I be able to say 'definitely'!? I was showing an ero expression on my face, but I was currently a [King]! I was everyone's [King]! I couldn't let them see such a shameful side to myself! But, the opponent's strategy was amazing! Mirana-san's oppai will definitely be a powerful enemy! As I was immersed in the joy and pain of self-restraint, I said with a bitter expression

"…Ravel, what should I do?"

After listening, Ravel calmly answered

"—If you defeat this opponent, then you can touch my breasts as much as you like, so please overcome your desires during the match."

—What! My manager said something like that without blushing or getting embarrassed! …Thank you so much! I am deeply grateful! What more could I ask from such a capable manager!? Bearing this powerful awareness in my mind, I solemnly responded to Dulio

"If you use Mirana-san's oppai, I will definitely endure because I have my Ravel's!"

Under such circumstances where I wasn't sure exactly what else to say, Griselda-san turned to Bina-shi to say

“You must have it tough.”

Bina-shi calmly replied with

“It’s very normal.”

While on the opposite end, Dulio spoke while laughing to the point that he tried to hold back the tears in his eyes

“Oh, Ise-kun really is quite interesting.”

—A single cough caused the conversation to flow back on topic.

“Ahem. Well then.”

Saying that, the next member of the [Brave Saints] stood up. —It was a Japanese man whose lean face seemed to indicate that he was roughly thirty years old. His black hair was tied behind his head — it was a so-called samurai’s hairstyle. The light illuminating the back of his hand was a J.

“I am the Seraph Metatron-sama’s [Jack], my name is Shinra Kiyotora. Let us be acquainted from now on.”

Ah, it’s Metatron-san’s Jack! I had met Metatron-san before. He was quite fascinated with Japanese culture and practiced real ninjutsu[161] …. However, the man’s name reminded me of someone.

“Could it be that you’re a relative of Shinra Tsubaki-senpai?”

Indeed, the name Shinra was from Japan’s special ability user group — one of the Five Principal Clans. To be able to become a reincarnated Angel, he was probably from this family. Based on that, I thought that this Shinra-san and Shinra Tsubaki-senpai should have some sort of connection. Moreover, he resembled the appearance of Shinra-senpai to some degree. The man — Shinra Kiyotora also seemed to know Shinra Tsubaki-senpai.

“Tsubaki? She is the daughter of one of my relatives.”

Shinra Kiyotora immediately answered me. So he was from the same family. Dulio also commented again

“Seiko bears the blood of the Shinra clan, and he is also the uncle of the current head, the [Shinra White Tiger]. However, he believed in Christianity, and came to the Vatican on his own to become a warrior of the Church, and he is also well-known in Heaven.”

Oh, he’s from the Shinra clan but he became a follower of Christianity. And he eventually became a reincarnated Angel. He went through that kind of process huh. However, Shinra-san seemed to have something to say about one of the things that Dulio mentioned.

“…Dulio-dono, as I have said before, please do not call me Seiko…”

Dulio laughed loudly in return.

“But I heard that Kiyotora can be read as Seiko, plus I think Seiko is cuter anyway.”

That frivolous attitude was undeniably fitting of Dulio! It was certainly possible to read it as Seiko, but a Japanese man probably wouldn't like being called that name. Shrina-san coughed again.

"…Ahem, in any case, I am from the Shinra clan and I am also a reincarnated Angel. Although I am someone from the Five Principal Clans, both my mind and body are dedicated to Heaven and Metatron-sama."

After Shinra-san's self-introduction ended, the last member of the [Brave Saints] for today was — Griselda-san. She stood up to introduce herself to us.

"I think most of you already know, I am Gabriel-sama's [Queen], Griselda Quarta. As always, thank you for the trouble of taking good care of our dear Xenovia…"

[No, not at all.]

Aside from Xenovia, Ravel, Asia, Irina, Rossweisse-san and I all replied like so. Xenovia wore a complex expression on her face. In this manner, the self-introductions of the reincarnated Angels came to an end for today. The Joker Dulio, the Aces of the Four Great Seraphim, Metatron-san's Jack, and Gabriel-san's Queen. As reincarnated Angels, they held the characteristics of their respective cards, and would be able to utilise their tremendous strength so long as they were in sets, which they were actually able to do in their present team combination. … Among the Four Great Seraphim, only Michael-san, Raphael-san, and Uriel-san brought their [Brave Saints], aside from their Aces into the Isolation Barrier Field. The remaining Angels were Gabriel-san, Metatron-san, and other members of the Seraphim. The remaining reincarnated Angels had been selected as participants in the tournament. But for now, even without mentioning the Aces, Queens, Jacks, and members of Ten and below, I was quite worried. Also, the female Queen (the Seraph Sandalphon-san's Queen) was also another one of them. I would have liked to meet them as well.

"The other members…won't be coming?"

When I said that, Dulio smiled bitterly.

"If I brought them over, then I'd be giving Ise-kun too much trouble. So most of my players are on standby. I originally wanted to bring over a [Ten] and another [Queen], but…"

Having mentioned the Ten and the other Queen, their reason for declining the meeting was that

"They presumably felt that their own ability was still insufficient."

"Aren't they also strong?"

Irina followed up for her comrades who couldn't be here. After all, being given such important jobs, they presumably were rather incredible people. However, regarding the Aces of the Seraphim Metatron-san and Sandalphon-san, they had originally been invited to partake in the tournament…but because of their special tasks, their official entry would have to wait until the end of the qualifying rounds, so we wouldn't encounter them in this match. There were also rumours of 'another trump card' — the existence of an Extra Joker that made Ravel quite concerned. But it didn't seem

like they were in Dulio's team…. Xenovia let out a sigh after seeing the members in front of her.

"No matter how you look at it, they're all incredible. When I was a warrior of the Church, the few people who had earned a reputation for themselves have now been gathered here. If this was the previous era, they would be a fighting force capable of taking on ultimate-class Devils and their peerages."

Just as Xenovia had said, all of the members who had gathered at my house were known to be powerful when they were Church warriors. Of course, that also included Xenovia and Irina. …If they're members who can easily defeat high-class Devils, and if we were still in that era, then they'd be strong enough to launch an assault on the Underworld. After the Angels completed their self-introductions, Dulio clapped his hands.

"—Anyway, that's pretty much how it is. Before our supervisor arrives, why don't we have a chat?"

Even if we were going to be opponents later on, Dulio was still so cheerful as a captain, and the atmosphere in the room remained vibrant. After we had been chatting for about ten minutes, there was a knock on the door.

"Ise, a late guest has arrived."

Mum said to me through the door. It should be the supervisor who was mentioned earlier. In the instant that the door opened and we saw that person — the atmosphere immediately changed and became filled with tension.

"My apologies. It's because I'm not very familiar with the geography of Japan."

That person — was an ultimate-class Devil. His silver hair was paired with a suit, a twenty-something-year-old man who appeared to be of European descent. His deep green eyes gave off an endless sort of feeling. The man revealed a thin smile as he introduced himself.

"It's nice to meet you, everyone of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team. I am the supervisor of the [Joker of Heaven] team — Rudiger Rosenkreutz. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

—Rudiger Rosenkreutz! …As a reincarnated Devil who was originally human, he had established many legends in the Rating Game of the Underworld! As an ultimate-class Devil, he was one of the strongest in the Game — he was ranked seventh. Even so…this man was the supervisor for Dulio's team! It was quite a shock when we heard about the news. It wasn't just me, even the Underworld's media was in an uproar. This man had once served as a referee for my match against Sairaorg-san. …Moreover, the most crucial point was that he was one of the reincarnated Devils that I saw as my goal. I stood up to greet him solemnly.

"It's nice to meet you, I am the [King] of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team, Hyoudou Issei. Thank you for serving as a referee of my match in the past."

Rudiger-san waved his hand and replied with

"You allowed me to see a wonderful match back then, I was very satisfied."

Diethelm-san, who originally sat beside Dulio, stood up and offered his seat. He probably took into account that Rudiger-san…the supervisor should be the one to sit next to the captain, Dulio. After Rudiger-san thanked Diethelm-san, he sat down slightly opposite me. —I could strongly feel his stateliness. His manner of walking and sitting were both like an art, and his entire body exuded a sense of dignity. Compared to the former human reincarnated Devils that I had met before, the atmosphere that he gave off was as far from them as heaven and earth—. At this time, Ravel said

“I never imagined that you would become the supervisor of this team, Rudiger-sama…”

Ravel’s words mirrored the opinion of the Underworld’s media. As a Devil of the Underworld, Rudiger Rosenkreutz had not registered to participate on his own, but instead chose to join the tournament as a supervisor!? —This staggering situation had caused a great deal of unease. In response to that, Rudiger-san smiled

“Fufufu, well, I should say that it was by chance, or an unexpected encounter. Since their aim and mine were the same, we decided to join hands in this tournament. In any case, it’s nice to meet you. —Hyoudou Issei-kun.”

The person that I saw as a target was trying to shake my hand! For the sake of etiquette, I immediately reached out and shook his hand over the table.

“Y-Yes. The same goes for us, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Rudiger-san smiled cheerfully.

“You don’t have to be so stiff, your opponent isn’t me, it’s Dulio and the others.”

Dulio also laughed

“That’s right, I’ll feel lonely if you only look at supervisor Rudiger, Ise-kun.”

Ah, to be able to meet a legend among reincarnated Devils, I couldn’t help letting my attention drift towards him! He was also the supervisor of the opposing team, so I’d still be worried even if not for the Underworld’s media. In order to turn the atmosphere back to how it was before their supervisor Rudiger arrived, Ravel stood up.

“Since we’ve all introduced ourselves now, I think it’s time for some fresh tea. I’ve already prepared a cake for everyone, so we’ll also refill everyone’s tea.”

After hearing that, Irina also stood up.

“I’ll go downstairs to bring the tea and cake up!”

After saying that, she left the room and went downstairs. Rudiger-san looked at each of us who were members of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team. Suddenly — his eyes paused on Bina-shi. Rudiger-san asked

“…Is the masked woman over there the one called Bina Lessthan?”

“Yes, it’s nice to meet you.”

“…The same goes for me. Your match was very interesting. Perhaps you have some

experience with the Rating Games? …Though, it is somewhat discernible that you are familiar with the rules.”

“Well, I wonder about that.”

…In that brief exchange, it felt as though he had discerned something. To be more exact, just by watching Bina-shi’s battle, he seems to have gained some kind of clue…? Ravel’s expression didn’t appear to change, but she was becoming nervous on the inside. Sitting beside her, I could clearly feel that. …If they were able to gain any information, they would be able to use that information in their strategy, was what Ravel was probably thinking. When Rudiger-san noticed Asia, he asked

“Oh, Asia Argento-san, your face seems a bit pale.”

“…Ah, please excuse me. I’ve just had a lot on my mind lately.”

In order to follow up for Asia, I interjected

“Ah, about that, Asia—”

However, my explanation was interrupted, and Rudiger-san continued

“It is after all the most difficult period for a club president. Asia Argento-san, the best thing to do at this time is to speak with your predecessor or your other seniors. It’s no good to keep everything to yourself.”

“Y-Yes.”

Asia replied…. …Rudiger-san’s investigation was thoroughly detailed…! Ravel said

“…You seem quite familiar with Asia-sama’s situation.”

Rudiger-san’s cheerful smile remained unchanged.

“She will be an opponent in the upcoming game after all.”

“……I see.”

All Ravel could do was smile…she was actually so nervous that she had completely tensed up. We continued chatting lightly for a while to relax, but Rudiger-san maintained his gentlemanly conversation manner. At that time, Irina appeared behind a small dining car with cake and tea.

“Here is cake and fresh black tea.”

While serving cake to the guests, Irina said

“The person who helped me to cut the cake was Elme—”

“Irina-sama! I-I will also help you!”

Interrupting Irina, Ravel also helped to serve the black tea. After that, the meeting ended without any incidents…. After the conclusion, Ravel spoke to me alone.

“…My behaviour just then was somewhat contrived, I’m sorry. However, I think it’s better if Rudiger-sama doesn’t know that Elmenhilde-sama is currently living with us.”

She meant when Irina was serving cake huh. Irina was originally going to mention

Elmenhilde's name, but Ravel judged that that would be bad. Ravel continued

"Since Rudiger-sama has even investigated Asia-sama's situation to such detail, it's safe to say that he's thoroughly investigated every member of our team already."

"Ravel, do you want to hide Elmenhilde?"

Ravel nodded. …It seemed like she was planning to add Elmenhilde into the team. That was why she wanted to hide information about her. With a sharp look, Ravel said

"The battle has already begun, Ise-sama. The purpose of that man's visit was for final confirmation. —He personally came to confirm our faces, attitudes, lives, environment, and atmosphere."

So Rudiger-san personally came to get a feel for us at home….

"…That's pretty scary."

"After all, that man rose to the top and is ranked seventh. In addition, Rudiger Rosenkreutz-sama will take advantage of his opponent's mental state to manipulate the game's situation. The number of high-class Devils from the original seventy-two pillars who have been crushed both physically and mentally by that man is countless."

The other player that Bina-shi and I had spoken about the other day — it was Rudiger-san. …We were going to fight against the [Joker of Heaven] team commanded by Dulio, while their supervisor was the ultimate-class Devil ranked seventh in the professional Rating Games — Rudiger Rosenkreutz.

Part 4

That evening—. Rias, Akeno-san, and the Gremory peerage members who were participating in the tournament were going to return rather late due to certain things that they had to do, so I wouldn't be able to sleep with Rias tonight. Speaking of which, ever since the tournament began, Rias would often take Akeno-san to a particular place. She didn't tell me about the details of the situation, but it appeared to be related to the tournament, which is why she probably didn't tell me. According to the tournament's system, a game could be set up quite quickly after applying. Rias had an upcoming game, so she obviously wanted to prepare. …As for myself, my next match with Dulio was just as important, of course, but the tournament didn't only consist of this match. So long as one registered, the next match, the one after it, and the one after that one…all of those matches could be arranged in this fashion. In reality, I was quite worried about what would happen after Dulio's match — having said that, this was one of the most crucial matches for us. Even if our teams were divided, we were still part of the same Gremory peerage, and our relationship was no different than it was before. But we were rivals in this tournament. So we had to act separately. In any case, the person sleeping with me tonight was Asia. …Speaking of Asia, she didn't seem to be in a very good mood after the meeting ended. Perhaps it was because she was angry about the way I looked at Mirana-san, who was also a sister. Ah, I'd already told her before going to bed that the number one sister in my mind was Asia! No no, perhaps it would be better if I told Asia that she was someone precious to me again!? …B-But, Mirana-san is also pretty cute, and she's also got an enormous rack…. …No, I can't! I shook my head, and changed the 'beautiful sister' in my mind from Mirana-san to Asia-chan! In any case, Asia was important to me, and I had to tell that to her! —When I had finally sorted out my feelings, I changed into my pyjamas while Asia had gone to take a bath…it was at that time when I heard a knock at the door. A voice came from the other side of the door.

[Ise-sama, do you mind if I interrupt?]

It was Ravel's voice. She wanted to talk about something before going to bed. Perhaps it was related to Rudiger-sama.

"Come in."

After I answered like that, Ravel opened the door and entered. I originally thought that she had come to discuss the situation, but I was stunned as soon as I saw Ravel's appearance! —Ravel was wearing a transparent white negligee! Needless to say, Ravel's abundant oppai were faintly visible, and I could also see their tips through the negligee! Perhaps because Ravel was embarrassed, her face was so red that it couldn't possibly get any redder, and she stood on the spot while fidgeting shyly. She had let her hair down, and there was also a touch of red lipstick on her lips. Ravel said with a determined expression

"…R-Rias-sama and Akeno-sama aren't here tonight, so Ise-sama will sleep together with Asia-sama tonight, right?"

"Y-Yeah, that should be the case…"

“T-The three of you normally sleep together…”

I gulped! The manager who normally supported me in such a calm manner was now showing such a demure expression, and on top of that, she was wearing this erotic and transparent negligee…I couldn’t calm down! While enduring the embarrassment, she said in a loud voice

“…I’ll be the third person tonight! Ise-sama’s night should be managed by m-me, so that’s why I’ve come!”

M-Management of my night—. …What did I just hear? I actually heard such surprising words from Ravel’s mouth…! I-I simply couldn’t imagine what kind of management this would entail! Ravel seemed to prepare herself mentally before moving closer to me, step by step. …Her transparent negligee was right in front of me! Her bountiful oppai were flaunting their existence in front of me! M-My manager, my [Bishop] truly has such enticing oppai! Ravel’s trembling hands grabbed onto my right hand — and then she pressed it onto her right breast! My right hand enjoyed the full sensation of her ample oppai, and my hand almost sank into it! Such perfection! Such softness! All five of my fingers were screaming ‘thank you…’ as they enjoyed utmost happiness! It was in this instant that I realised that I had such pleasant oppai right by my side! Ravel looked up and said with a slightly drowsy expression

“…Xenovia-sama and the others asked me if I did anything unspeakable in the office’s storeroom…and I got carried away by responding with [Yeah, in regards to that, I could satisfy any and all of Ise-sama’s impulsive requests there.].”

“Impulsive requests…?”

“M-My mind and body already belong to my [King], in other words, you, Ise-sama. Regardless of whether it’s work…o-or other things, I will respond to you…. I-If you want to touch w-women’s b-breasts, then I can immediately satisfy your request…I think that’s part of my job…”

……Naturally, blood gushed out from my nose. …What on earth is t-this girl saying! I-If you say that, then every time after work

“Phew — when we take a break, I want to squeeze some oppai. Ravel, may I?”

“Yes, it’s my pleasure!”

—What are you making me imagine!? N-No, this should be okay from my position as a [King]! Even if I do hold the highest position, playing with oppai while in the middle of work is difficult……. ……C-Could such a thing be allowed…? …As a Harem King, can I allow such things!? Damn it! At times like this, if Azazel-sensei were here, he’d be able to give me the best advice! Sensei, hurry up and defeat Trihexa and come back! So that you can answer my questions! Rias and Akeno-san, those two onee-samas aren’t here—. On nights like these, the Hyoudou residence — difficult situations like this happen in my room! It’s normally Rias and Asia who sleep with me. But if Rias isn’t here and the balance between the girls who live with me is upset, unexpected visitors start showing up in front of me. Normally speaking, Akeno-san would creep into bed without anyone noticing, but that Akeno-san wasn’t present at the moment…which is why an unexpected situation like this occurred! While enjoying the sensation of Ravel’s oppai, I imagined our workplace situation

from now on! I-It was at this time when someone stepped into the room! Looking in that direction — it was Asia who had returned from her bath!

“…Ise-san? …And Ravel-san?”

Wearing her usual pajamas, Asia looked at me and Ravel — I was touching Ravel’s oppai while she was dressed in a transparent negligee — she looked back and forth between us!

“A-Asia!? T-This is because…!”

I immediately tried to make an excuse — but not only did Ravel not move away, she liberated her usually restrained attitude, and instead she clung onto me tightly!

“Asia-sama, excuse me. I’ve already reserved Ise-sama. Tonight I’ll be in charge of Ise-sama’s night management…”

After saying that, Ravel’s soft body pressed against me even more tightly…! The bath towel in Asia’s hand fell to the floor, and she seemed to be at a loss on what to do.

“…Reserved? N-Night management…? Ise-san, did you have such an arrangement with Ravel-san…? I-I haven’t heard about it…”

Well that’s only natural, because I didn’t know about it either! This is something that was only mentioned just now! I didn’t even know what to say anymore! —All of a sudden, the lights in the room switched off! In an instant, I sensed two people run into the room at an incredible pace! The two people approached the bed that Ravel, Asia, and I were on at a speed that mirrored lightning! In the darkness, those two people — I was finally able to see them clearly. —It was Xenovia and Irina! R-Really! These two people actually switched off the lights and then came running in like ninjas! Even in the dark, Devils were able to see clearly. Ravel, Asia and I were in the centre of the bed, while Xenovia and Irina had respectively occupied the left and right side, leaving me completely surrounded. Xenovia turned her face towards me as she asked

“Ise, your eyes were completely glued to that sister’s chest during today’s meeting.”

Irina leaned against my back, and rested her head on top of my shoulder as she looked at my face and said

“That’s right! I also noticed where darling was staring!”

They were talking about Mirana-san, as it seemed that like Asia, they had also noticed….

“T-That is…I couldn’t help it! Dulio told me as well, so I couldn’t stop myself from staring at them.”

Although I didn’t actually see them, I couldn’t help thinking about that shy reaction of hers as well as the outrageously large oppai underneath her sister’s uniform. So I couldn’t help staring at them! Xenovia grabbed my hand and placed it on top of her own oppai while a sense of regret seemed to appear on her face!

“Kuh…. Although I’m fairly confident about the size of my own breasts…I definitely

lose against Mirana Shatarova's…!"

Even though you have a regretful expression on your face, doing something like this…! Thank you! The healthy bounciness and superb sensation of Xenovia's breasts caused my brain to boil! While I enjoyed the sensory pleasure of Xenovia's breasts, she said

"Rather than this, don't you have something to say to Asia?"

Feeling Asia's gaze upon me, I looked at Asia who was beside me.

"…"

The aforementioned Asia had puffed out her cheeks and was clearly in a poor mood.

"A-About that, Asia, I actually…"

"…I-I'm also a sister."

"Mmm, I know."

"…Ise-san, you like big oppai like Rias-oneesama's, right?"

I wouldn't be myself if I denied that, so that much should be certain—. With a determined expression, Asia immediately took off her pyjamas, and showed off her completely nude birthday suit to me! Even though her face was completely red, Asia still mustered the courage to take both of my hands — and place them onto her own breasts! An incredible sensation assaulted my hands! —It was at this point that I noticed! …I confirmed the feeling that I was unable to fit into my hands…! I occasionally touched Asia's chest, so that's why I was able to realise. —Asia's oppai had definitely grown bigger again! …Of course, they weren't as large as Rias or Akeno-san's, but they were quickly catching up to Xenovia's and Irina's…! Their touch, elasticity and their firmness, it was completely different from a year ago…! — Compared to when we first met, the size of Asia's oppai had already grown immensely! While blushing a deep shade of red, Asia spoke to me in a strong tone of voice

"I-I'm also growing! T-They'll definitely become like Xenovia-san's and Irina's…they'll be roughly the same size as Ravel-san's, no, they'll definitely become larger than Ravel-san's! I'll definitely become a sister with oppai that exceed Mirana-san's, Ise-san!"

—What. ……Asia, she actually declared that strongly without retreating at all. … Compared to her usual self, she'd normally be overwhelmed by Rias and Akeno-san's presence and be left with teary eyes…. Although she did have help from Xenovia and Irina, I never expected that Asia would be able to make such a declaration! Seeing Asia like this, Xenovia and Irina began to cry.

"…Yes, that's right, Asia."

"Uuh, we've tried all of the different methods to increase our bust size! Darling, I've also gotten slightly larger by the way!"

Irina's additional information leaked out…. With a poignant expression on her face, Ravel nodded.

“Devils and humans are different, even if we mature, it’s still possible for our bodies to continue growing. This is not only because of our demonic energy, there are also other reasons…perhaps Asia-sama’s thoughts have caused her reincarnated body to grow.”

Speaking of which, I had heard that after Devils mature into adults, their oppai could still continue to grow. Perhaps Asia was an example of this rumour, though this may also have been Asia’s original growth. Or perhaps both of these aspects had combined, producing the ultimate result—. While thinking about such matters, I continued to enjoy Asia’s twin peaks…. Oh, I really want to bury my face into them and then go to sleep like this. Seeing me obsessed with Asia’s soft twin peaks, Xenovia suddenly realised something as she said

“Hold on! Ise, you only want Asia’s oppai!? I originally planned to spend until morning with you!”

“That’s right! Darling, if you don’t believe me, then we can go to that room tonight and you can fall asleep on my chest!”

Ravel then joined in as well!

“Impossible! Tonight’s management has already been assigned to me! Please return to your own rooms, Xenovia-sama and Irina-sama!”

The three people then continued to declare ‘it’s me’, ‘it’s me’, while Asia displayed a tender expression

“…Ah, Ise-san, i-if you keep on going like that…”

Asia’s body began to quiver, and I was no longer in a state where I could simply stop! Both of us were already approaching a point of no return! What should I do next, should I just sleep here, or should I go to Irina’s ero room to sleep; just as I wavered between those two options, another person entered the room again.

“…Seriously, what are you all doing…”

It was Rias who had just come home. She looked at the scene in front of her, and sighed deeply.

Notes

1. Asia seems to stutter and mispronounce a few words.
2. This is the term used originally, so I’ve kept it. Spartan in this sense means something along the lines of a strict, military-style education.
3. Approximately fifty square metres. That’s five hundred and thirty-eight feet for the Americans.
4. Her voice is inaudible during the ellipses, though you can guess what she was saying.

5. Alternate reading is: Joker of Heaven.
6. Reference to the short story entitled “Nekomata☆Ninja-Scroll” in DX.2 Life.5.

Life.2
Dragon Attracts Dragon

Part I

On a clear day, I visited Ajuka-sama's research facility after the end of business, and used the dedicated communication device to communicate with Azazel-sensei who was in the Isolation Barrier Field. …Last night, I ended up being with Asia, Xenovia, Irina, Ravel, as well as Rias and Akeno; all seven of us had slept together. …And just like last time, I was kicked off the bed by Xenovia, and awoke on the icy cold floor. Since it was the first time that we had all spoken in a while, I told everyone in the Isolation Barrier Field about all of the events that had happened recently.

"That's roughly how things have played out so far, and I've been on a winning streak so far."

The large display showed Sirzechs-sama, who cheerfully replied after listening to my report with

[Congratulations! Rias has also been on a winning streak, ah I'm happy! In that case, I can fight Trihexa with peace of mind!]

—After saying that, he landed a stunning blow. …Trihexa still couldn't be defeated even though it had received such a deadly strike, and that made me realise once again just how exceptional this monster was. Then, Leviathan-sama appeared on the display, and made a request of me.

[Tell me more about what's been happening with Sona-chan! Otherwise, I might get eaten by Trihexa!]

As her voice faded, she hurled an enormous piece of ice…. Of course, I couldn't imagine Leviathan-sama being eaten. Next to her, Azazel-sensei sighed.

[Seriously, these guys are so rowdy…]

I couldn't help but show a wry smile. At that time, Azazel-sensei looked at my face and seemed to have noticed something.

[Ise, you look troubled. Is it about the tournament? Or are you not used to being a [King] yet?]

—Hm. …As expected of sensei. He read my mind with just a glance.

"…It's both of them."

Sensei nodded as he said

[I see.]

And then he asked me

[Say, Ise. —Have you ever truly enjoyed fighting ever since you became a Devil?]

….

…….

…I couldn't immediately answer that question. To be more precise, because I had almost never thought of such things, I paused after thinking about it briefly. … Enjoy…fighting…? …There were times when I felt emotional during battles. I had also experienced the joys of victory that were enough to have an impact on my life. But, those kinds of victories were sparse, and up until now, I had been driven to fight because of the pressure of 'I must win'. After all, most of my battles had been when my comrades and I were in a crisis, when we had been attacked by those who had come to destroy our daily lives. I believed that Vali was someone who enjoyed battles. That was the type of person that my rival was.

"…I don't think I have. Every time I fight, I don't have that kind of feeling as my opponents have always been stronger than me, and I had to pour in everything I had in order to survive. When I was under Rias, the idea of granting her certain victory was what drove me to become stronger."

After listening to my candid answer, sensei nodded with certainty, and then said

[But you know, the tournament that you're participating in right now isn't that kind of serious fight — it's just sport. Even if your opponents are stronger than you by a lot, it's still a 'game'. Even if this 'game' is called a Rating Game, to Devils — or perhaps to the people in the Underworld, it is important. Since you're already a high-class Devil, not only will you be unable to ignore this, you'll also have to formally participate in future.]

Indeed, the path of participating in professional Rating Games was originally out of reach for me, but it was clearly visible now that I had become a high-class Devil. It was no longer an unattainable dream. Sensei continued

[I think I've also said this before. It doesn't matter if you have fun or if you worry. Regardless of whether it's love, school life, or daily life, as long as you experience them, your troubles will grow. The Rating Games — the tournament follows the same reasoning.]

Azazel-sensei pointed to his own head.

[Devils' bodies do not grow old, but the same does not apply to the mind. Even if you are a reincarnated Devil, it's impossible to maintain a youthful spirit forever, you know? So, you should have worries and enjoy your youth while you're still young. These experiences can only be obtained while you're young. You may not be able to think things through while you're young, but once you get older, you'll realise that those bitter experiences in your youth are precious.]

—Hmm. …Experiences that can only be gained while I'm young, huh. Although I can live for ten thousand years, a Devil's life is almost eternal, so what exactly is considered young? Having lived for just eighteen years, it was something that I couldn't imagine. —But, high school is undoubtedly the most youthful period. So all of the experiences and feelings that I've had until now — they're highly precious memories for the future me. In ten thousand years' time, what will I think when I reminisce about my high school days? Perhaps after a while, I may forget…. It was too ethereal for me to imagine, so all I could do was smile. —At that time, Michael-san appeared on the display, and while showing a bright smile, he said

[Ah, if I remember correctly, it was Blazer Shining Aura Darkness Blade, right? Ah,

that brings back memories. Back then, even your eyes were sparkling. You always had a strange pose as you leaned against the wall muttering about some strange things.]

Seemingly infuriated about that, Azazel-sensei retorted against Michael-san

[Shut up, Michael! Why do you always have to bring that up!? You've always had such a poor personality!]

However, Leviathan-sama ignored those two, and she began to recall her own memories.

[That's right. That's what youth is! That made me remember how Sirzechs-chan and Grayfia-chan were on opposing sides as enemies, and their love was painfully caught in the middle…it was so touching.]

Seeing Leviathan-sama act like a young maiden, Sirzechs-sama (destruction form) scratched his forehead as he shyly said

[Hahaha, in fact, I looked for gaps to meet in secret, and from then on, she was the only one in my eyes.]

…Their peaceful dialogues always made it seem as though they weren't fighting. However, it was possible to see explosions on other parts of the display, and enormous attacks flew around in every direction! Azazel-sensei calmed his breathing, and then summed things up.

"In short, situations like this also exist, and I'm afraid it's almost time. Ise, since this is the case, you should find someone that you don't normally talk to and discuss this with them. Maybe it'll give you a new outlook? Though it may also increase your troubles."

…Someone that I don't normally talk to? Hmm, who might that be? …A new outlook huh. I was relatively concerned about what sensei said, so I thought of trying it out at once.

Part 2

And so I went to a pier in the neighbouring prefecture the next day. I started fishing on the embankment. I didn't come alone though, I invited two other people.

"I didn't expect you to invite me fishing."

The person on my left side who spoke while tying his fishing line was — Vali. Indeed, this guy was one of them. I spun my reel as I said

"Yeah, somehow. After all, Kiba and Sairaorg-san have their matches soon so I didn't want to disturb them."

Kiba — Rias' team had a match today, and the match between Sairaorg-san and Cao Cao, as well as my own match against Dulio were quickly approaching. So, that's why the guys who I got along with couldn't be invited for fishing this time. And the other person that I invited was—. The person holding a fishing rod on my right was—.

"…Even so, this group is too unreasonable, Hyoudou…. It just happens to be the Two Heavenly Dragons plus me."

It was Saji! Coincidentally, he came over to my house for something so I forcibly invited him as well. I said to him

"I'm going fishing, so let's talk about stuff there."

And that's how I ended up dragging him along. From his expression, Saji seemed rather concerned about Vali. After all, it was the first time that the three of us had gotten together.

"Hahaha, you don't actually hate Vali, do you Saji?"

Upon hearing my question, Saji's eyes shifted towards Vali.

"I can't say that I hate him…it's just that I don't know how to deal with him…*mutter mutter*…"

Saji seemed to mutter about something on his own. After Vali reeled a fish up, he said

"Since you're one of the Five Great Dragon Kings, there's nothing to be concerned about right, Saji Genshirou?"

"Ara, you actually know my name?"

"For the time being."

"For the time being, huh…"

Sandwiched in the middle between Vali and Saji, there was still a unique wall between them that I felt. Saji sighed and said

"I…came to challenge Hyoudou, but I didn't expect to be invited fishing. On top of

that, the Hakuryuukou is also here, which is completely unexpected!”

Well, don’t say it like that. Who could’ve known that you would show up just when I was about to invite Vali to fish with me? It was such a rare opportunity, so I pulled you over so that we could all fish together. The three of us fished in silence…but there was still a strange atmosphere between me and Saji. It was because Saji came to challenge me. Vali also seemed to notice this and smiled.

“By the way, the group matchings were already decided earlier. It seems Hyoudou Issei will have a match with the Sitri peerage. It’s right after the match against Dulio Gesualdo, isn’t it?”

—Indeed, my match with the Sitri team was going to be after that! It was another important match that I had after the game with Dulio. I always wanted to wash away last year’s regret, and I was looking forward to an opportunity to challenge the Sitri peerage again, and now I could finally make that happen in this tournament. I didn’t imagine that I’d have another chance with Sona-senpai — and Saji for a rematch. The chance for revenge had come within my reach so quickly…! Although the Gremory peerage had been the victors of that match, to me — it was a match filled with disappointment and regret. After all, I had successfully used my Balance Breaker, but I was forced to retire. In the match against Riser, I loathed my own lack of strength, and after the regrets I held from that match, I wanted to rid myself of them…but that result is what happened in the end. —I was defeated by Sona-senpai and Saji. So, I was deeply grateful for this match. Perhaps I could get my payback for last time. How could I not get fired up for a match that would give me a chance at revenge!? Vali’s words filled me and Saji with an unspeakable pressure.

“Yeah, that match is after the one against Dulio.”

Saji’s expression was also filled with fighting spirit — but he immediately revealed a bitter smile.

“I was pretty motivated when I went to your house. After I challenged you loud and clear ‘I won’t lose to you!’, all you replied to me with was ‘Do you want to go fishing?’. …My entire rhythm was completely shattered, so I don’t know what to say anymore…”

…Don’t worry about it so much. You just happened to come along just when I really wanted to go fishing.

“Well, the truth is that I was ignited by your challenge to me. But this is this, and that is that; I already had plans with Vali, so I just brought you over as well.”

After hearing that, Saji settled down.

“I get it, that’s why I said ‘Okay, let’s go’, and I came with you.”

That’s right, you’re so understanding, Saji. Faced with Saji like this, I answered his earlier challenge to me

“No matter what, I’ll definitely defeat you this time.”

Saji then immediately stood up and replied to me

“No, the person who will win is me! I never considered last year’s match as a victory

over you. So this time, we'll take you guys on with everything we've got, and we'll take you down! No matter what happens in the match, I believe in my master — the ability of Sona-kaichou!"

"You still call her 'kaichou'?"

I couldn't help but ask. After Xenovia became the new Student Council president, Saji's address towards Sona-senpai was still 'kaichou'. Saji shyly scratched his cheek as he said

"I thought about it for a long time, but 'kaichou' is special to me. There is only one 'kaichou' in my heart. So that's why I call her 'kaichou'. At the very least, I'll continue with this until I graduate. Of course, it's not that I don't recognise Xenovia as president, okay? Xenovia is also a great president, and I will support her well. However, my master is Sona-'kaichou'."

"As long as you're happy. You also have to get along with Xenovia. After all, she's one of my servants now."

"Of course. I will do my best to support her. —But I will win when it comes to the game."

"Impossible, I'll be the one to win."

At this time, Vali shrugged as he said

"Hmph, I'll defeat the both of you anyway."

Ooh, those words really suited Vali. However, I really didn't know whether his remark at that moment was just a joke, or whether he was actually serious. My opportunities to speak with this guy had increased lately, and it was often difficult to see his true intentions. Incidentally, the difference between the three of our teams was that my team was on a winning streak, Vali was also undefeated by great margins, and the Sitri team had lost one match against god-class beings, but they were otherwise undefeated. My comrades had also performed fairly well in the tournament. Vali then asked me

"Well, why did you invite me to fish then?"

—He asked. Inspired by sensei's words last night, I passed the question that sensei asked me onto the fighting maniac. Vali declined with

"What is the meaning of anything that I say now?"

But he then said

"It's true that you haven't enjoyed fighting. But, you should've gained a sense of fulfilment during your battle against Sairaorg Bael."

That match against Sairaorg-san huh. That match could be described as — one where I learned and gained many, many things. It was the first time that I had felt such a sense of accomplishment from victory. Moreover, it was also the first time that I used my crimson armour.

"Well, it was an all-out brawl, so that feeling was justified. I learned a lot of things from that match."

But if you had to ask me whether or not I enjoyed fighting…it would be difficult to answer. I watched as my comrades were knocked down, and I clearly know that I was filled with regret and frustration at the time. I fought with my life on the line with the idea of 'I will win for Rias'.

'Oh, I'm enjoying this' — that kind of light-hearted statement was not suitable for that match.

"Then have you talked about it with Sairaorg Bael?"

"…I haven't yet. But there's still a bit of time until my match against Dulio begins, so I'll go to see him. After all, I also want to cheer him on."

I decided who I would see next. I would talk to Sairaorg-san before the match. Vali said

"Your match is coming up soon. Hmph, I guess it could be considered a good match for the spectators."

Saji spoke with a serious expression

"…Master Sairaorg will definitely win."

Like me, Saji also held a deep respect for Sairaorg-san.

"Yeah, I think so too."

Vali continued

"I wonder how much research Cao Cao has done on Sairaorg Bael, but if I had to speak about Cao Cao, if he received a direct hit from that Lion King in the right place, then his entire body would break. So this point—"

"How he can overcome that…you mean. …But he will also rely on his own techniques to find or create openings."

Hearing me say this, Vali showed a wry smile.

"After all, both you and I have been at his mercy."

Sairaorg-san's opponent was the most powerful Longinus wielder that both Vali and I had struggled against. …With a holy spear capable of dealing a tremendous blow to Devils, even Sairaorg-san wouldn't be able to withstand it…. At the same time though, Cao Cao would be defeated if he took a direct hit from Sairaorg-san. In other words, this match would hinge on a single fatal blow. I think the match will be filled with tension. Just as I was thinking about Sairaorg-san's situation, Saji suddenly said

"…About the question regarding 'enjoying battles' that Hyoudou just asked. Although it's complicated, I think I'd be the same as Hyoudou. We're both [Pawns], and we've fought for the sake of our master's victory, for the sake of our comrades, and for our own promotion. Isn't that why we expend our efforts to run back and forth during a match? To experience the fruits of our hard work, and to face a difficult match. There is simply no time to think about what we're enjoying in a match. If I lose, then it's hard to face my comrades and my master; I might even think of dying. And this thing is exactly the same as our battles against the terrorists. We have to face the enemy with the resolve to die."

…Indeed. It was exactly as Saji had said. We were both [Pawns] at the same time, we both participated in the Rating Games of the gathering of young Devils, and we faced the terrorist attacks together as well. As the situation constantly changed, it took a lot of effort to keep up…and there was no memory of enjoying a battle. However, Saji also said

“But if I had to say whether there was a ‘battle that I enjoyed’ in my mind, then it would be that battle against the Gremory peerage last year. I received a very good evaluation, and I was recognised by someone with an influential status. Sona-kaichou was also so happy that she cried for me. I more or less felt proud, and I was happy. Simply put, that was a meaningful match for me, and it’s also a memorable game to me.”

…I see, a meaningful battle huh. If I had something equivalent, then it would be the battle that I had with Sairaorg-san. I feel like that match was very meaningful…as for an ‘enjoyable battle’, I couldn’t think of one. My idea of an ‘enjoyable battle’ was slightly different from Saji’s…. If this continues, then I’ll simply become even more confused by my own doubts…I originally thought that it was impossible for battles to be enjoyed. I was planning to continue asking Vali, but at that time—. There was someone who suddenly struck up a conversation with us. Looking over, I saw two men standing there. One of them was a twenty-something Northern European man with a slim figure. He wore a fitting white suit. He had white-gold hair and golden eyes. He also had a beard. He was clearly a handsome guy, but he gave off a somewhat frivolous aura. The other one was a man with curly black hair and a handsome face. His eyes were a rare orange colour, and he wore a large robe…that would be called a chiton, right? It was something that the ancient Greeks wore. …I didn’t notice them walking towards us at all…and sure enough, a godly aura was emitted from their entire bodies! I had also seen these two before. But having said that, the sudden appearance of these two surprised me! After all, these two had appeared in broadcasts from the tournament and other related programs! When Vali saw the handsome guy with white-hold hair, he sighed and said

“…Vidar huh. What brings you to a place like this?”

After hearing that, the man called Vidar laughed and then said

“Hey now, is that how you should be acting towards your nii-chan? Seriously, you’re not cute at all. Fine, perhaps that’s what father likes about you.”

This handsome guy in front of us was the next chief god of the Norse mythology, Vidar! The son of that old man Odin! Vidar-san extended his hand out towards me and Saji to greet us.

“I am — Vidar. The son of Odin of the Aesir. A lot of things have happened, and I will be the next chief god. —Though, all of you already know that.”

Vali was now the adopted son of the old man, and that’s why Vidar-san was his stepbrother. This time, the curly-haired man greeted us.

“Likewise, I am Apollon. I will succeed the Zeus, the chief god of Olympus, and will become the new chief god.”

—The next chief god of Olympus, Apollon! I had also heard about this person…but I never expected that these two super VIPs would suddenly show up in front of us, so

both me and Saji could not help but panic! Even Saji's voice was shaking.

"…Ah whoa, Vidar! Apollon! Aren't these two major gods described in legends…!?"

Saji and I couldn't help but tremble in front of these two big names, while Vali introduced them.

"Vidar is a Norse god, and he is also the one and only existence that Fenrir fears. And Apollon over there is a god named after the sun. At the same time, he's also a bright patron god of the arts. Regardless, both of them are highly qualified as the next chief gods."

Upon hearing Vali's explanation, Vidar-san laughed.

"To actually be praised by the Hakuryuukou, perhaps it will even snow tomorrow? My father and Apollon's father Zeus will take a long time to return. Apparently they were also thinking about retirement. When the time is right, the authority will be handed over to me."

Vidar-san shrugged and continued

"In fact, I think my brother Thor is more suitable…but he also went to participate in the fight against Trihexa…. So it's come down to me according to the order."

Vali took a step forward and asked Vidar-san again

"Well, what did you come here for today?"

Vidar-san approached Vali, and familiarly put his arms around his neck. Vali's expression was full of disgust….

"Vali, don't be so cold. I only came to see my own stepbrother and — and the rumoured Oppai Dragon-kun. It also happened that the Dragon King-kun was also here."

Apollon-san nodded.

"As you are the Two Heavenly Dragons, I presume that you will have many exchanges from now on, so this is also a good opportunity for me to see the other side."

Vidar-san moved away from Vali and adjusted his collar as he asked

"We're also participating in the tournament, did you know that?"

It was precisely because I knew these two. I checked out all of the god-class beings participating in the tournament beforehand. They were all especially famous participants. I originally thought that I would meet them on the stage of the tournament…but they suddenly appeared in front of me! It really caught me off guard. Vali replied

"Of course, there is no one who doesn't know. But the fact that the next chief gods of Olympus and Aesir are on the same team touches on a problem."

The team comprised of the next chief gods of two mythologies participating in the world tournament naturally became a problem. Normally speaking, one should be

concerned with their own mythology's team. Having said that, only for this tournament, it was worth seeing because the main forces of each faction were participating! The other problem was — the team that Vidar-san and Apollon-san belonged to. When I had first heard about it, I thought 'You're kidding me right!?' because it was so far-fetched. Vidar-san responded with

"Our team, led by me and Apollon, is a team composed of young god-class beings. Well, the general is Typhon though."

The team that Vidar-san and Apollon-san belonged to was — the team with the King of Monsters, Typhon as the [King]. Typhon garnered a lot of attention at the opening ceremony of the tournament due to his towering stature. Among all of the forces, he was both strong and conspicuous. In addition to that, Vali speculated that he was among the top ten strongest of all factions. …I wonder how this tournament will go. Regardless of whether it's Śakra or Typhon, everyone who makes an appearance on the stage is well-known and they're all participating in the tournament. There are even some people who have also suggested that this tournament is a contest between the god-class beings in some sense. Also, since Śakra's team has the Four Heavenly Kings, and Typhon's team has the Vidar-san and Apollon-san in front of us, the balance of the competition has been completely destroyed. This kind of havoc that is only supposed to happen in movies has repeatedly happened, so the entire field has been repeatedly blown away. When god-class beings are given total freedom to rampage, the tournament field is easily destroyed. The tournament committee also allowed this situation…but even so, there are so many teams aiming to win the tournament. …Vali and I, as well as the Sitri peerage that Saji belonged to all held desires of being able to conquer the teams of god-class beings, so no one was going to speak out about it now. Vidar-san laughed cheerfully as he said

"In fact, anyone could've been the general, but Typhon himself said that he wanted to be [King], so Apollon and I yielded that to him."

"…In the Greek mythology that I belong to, it's not a bad thing to be able to make peace with Typhon whom we've always been in conflict with…but Typhon's selfishness still hasn't changed."

The topic of the gods suddenly went up a notch, and I couldn't keep up at all…. When Apollon-san noticed our reactions, he said to us

"That was rude of us. In any case, contrary to Vidar, I came here because there was something that I wanted to tell you."

After saying that, Apollon-san raised his index finger.

"Firstly, let me tell you about it. Hades is currently scheming something bad. It is very likely that it may involve you. I will put this into a formal report in future for all factions."

""""—What!""""

Upon hearing such news, all three of us reacted fiercely. …Hades still held hostility towards us even now. When Azazel-sensei went over to his side, he realised the dangerous ambition of that skeleton king. He had contact with the Evil Dragon Apophis, and it seems he obtained from Apophis and Rizevim some kind of evil weapon or tool…or something? The information and technology held by Qlippoth had

been mostly recovered by the forces of the world, but there were still some things that had not been looked into yet…. The chief gods of the next generation had conveyed this message to us, presumably to alert us of the danger. It was truly filled with unease. Vali asked Vidar-san and Apollon-san a question.

“I’ve also got a question here that I’d like to ask you two. Right now, among the various mythologies after the end of the Evil Dragon War, how many dangerous gods still exist? Although I can guess how many, I’d like to know your opinion as god-class beings.”

“Your question…is it for the sake of world peace? Or is it for your own ambition…in order to gain permission to fight against gods?”

“The possibility of the latter is relatively large…but I can’t deny the former either.”

Hearing Vali’s honest reply, his stepbrother laughed.

“Hahaha, what an honest answer. As my stepbrother, that’s a nice answer. Very well, then let me tell you. Currently, the most dangerous god is probably Hades. A similarly dangerous one is Indra — the Heavenly Emperor who appears to be participating in the tournament on the surface. If he takes the victory prize, then he’ll definitely ask for a war with Shiva. For the sake of this objective, he probably won’t try anything during the tournament.”

So the one to be most wary of at the moment was the God of the Realm of the Dead, Hades huh. Apollon-san then said

“I’ve heard that the god Indra is enjoying the tournament quite purely. He’s also enjoyed watching your battles—. That god is extremely honest when it comes to battles. That’s why it’s also terrifying…. Even if the field is an extremely simple and easy kind of match, the god Indra will prepare intensely, that’s the kind of god that he is.”

…So Śakra is the type that enjoys fighting. However, his ideas and aesthetics were different from Vali’s.

“There is a possibility that he will finally be able to achieve his long-desired dream of a war with Shiva, so he’s naturally motivated and unlikely to cause any incidents. The god Shiva’s commanding skill after the Evil Dragon War was also very outstanding.”

…Śakra was completely focused on the tournament. After all, the prize of the tournament was the ability to realise any wish, so if he could achieve his one dream of a war with Shiva, focusing his attention on the tournament was a wise and correct decision. Apollon-san also nodded in agreement

“Shiva-san himself is also considering the unknown…but when I think about the groups that are fighting against Trihexa including my father, the other gods of Olympus and the Norse mythology are watching the situation closely in case anyone tries to plunge the world into chaos.”

Both of these next-generation chief gods believed that Shiva-san had good intentions. …I met Shiva-san once, and though he gave people a rather frightening feeling, he wasn’t the type who would wreak destruction on the world without batting

an eyelid. Vidar-san spread his arms as he said

“—Mmm, that’s roughly what the situation is with Hades. It would be best for Team [DxD] to stay alert. Alright, we’ve already spoken about my stepbrother and the Sekiryuutei, and we’ve also met Dragon King-kun coincidentally. Apollon, it’s almost time.”

“Mmm, we’ve really interrupted your fishing trip. —Oh, there’s one more thing.”

Apollon-san seemed to want to say something, so he approached me and grabbed my hand as he said

“Finally, to the Sekiryuutei-dono, all of the songs about you are wonderful. As a patron god of the arts, I had to make sure that I told you that.”

“…H-haha, thank you.”

I didn’t know how to respond! The next chief god of the Greek mythology symbolising the sun said to me that the [Oppai Dragon’s] songs were wonderful, so I simply didn’t know how to react! I-Indeed, those songs have already been acknowledged by a patron god of the arts, so that’s a good thing…. Azazel-sensei, Sirzechs-sama, Leviathan-sama, the songs that you composed have been conveyed even to the gods…. I told the three of them in my mind. Just before Vidar-san went on his way, he said to us

“If we meet in a game, I won’t go easy. I’m also looking forward to a battle with you. If it wasn’t such a large-scale, lively competition, we wouldn’t participate, so you should enjoy this opportunity to it’s fullest.”

“Even if you’re my stepbrother, I won’t lose to you.”

“I won’t lose either!”

“I’ll do my best.”

—Like this, Vali, me, and Saji put our own respective thoughts into words.

After Vidar-san and Apollon-san left, Vali began to speak after a little while

“Vidar and Apollon huh. Hyoudou Issei, you should remember them. If you want to live in the next era, you may be in contact with the gods of various mythologies. Vidar and Apollon are also young leaders among the gods, so you will meet them many times from now on.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Seeing my response, Saji sighed.

“You’ll have a lot of trouble to deal with from now on. It’s such a relief that it’s a Dragon King that’s within my body.”

…I also hate troublesome things myself. But since I’m a high-class Devil now, it’s impossible for me not to be involved in these things. Moreover, they’ll come to find me on their own. Encountering these two future chief gods while fishing was truly

beyond my imagination. All of a sudden, our communication devices rang at the same time. We took out our own devices as we looked at them. After Vali saw his, a smile emerged on his face.

“Oh, Hyoudou Issei. That was some very interesting news.”

“Yeah, I also received some news from my comrades. This is pretty amazing, Hyoudou!”

Saji was also surprised by the news. I also…looked at the news and widened my eyes in surprise! Vali happily said

“—I didn’t expect that the [Rias Gremory] Team would use that mysterious [Pawn] now.”

Indeed, Ravel’s news was about that!

[Rias-sama will use her [Pawn] in the next match.]

That was what her message contained!

“Yeah, I also received that news at the same time.”

…The [Pawn] of Rias which was a mystery until now was finally going to have its veil removed!? Vali revealed a genuine smile

“If my predictions are correct…fufufu, it looks like things will become interesting. We should go to watch the game together.”

Saji and I looked at each other and nodded as we accepted Vali’s proposal.

Part 3

After Vali, Saji and I stopped fishing, we immediately transported ourselves to a place close to the arena so that we could watch the Rating Game that was being held in the Underworld — Rias' game. We entered via the entrance for related personnel, and then arrived at the special viewing room. The match began just as we took our seats! Rias' team and her opponent's team (a team led by an ultimate-class Devil as the [King]) both appeared together on a vast field that was mostly made up of the sea…one person from Rias' team took a step forward first — it was a man who wore a familiar black coat. The colour of his hair was a mix of black and gold, and the aura surrounding his entire body was of a similar colour! …S-So it's this guy! This guy was Rias' [Pawn]! The scene that occurred before me left me dumbfounded, and all I could do was stare at the game. The man in the large black coat flew and charged at the opponents across the sea while he reached out with his arm. … Enveloped in an incredibly potent aura, it was compressed and compressed again until it turned into a powerful destructive shockwave! Upon seeing the man who flew in the air in front of them, the announcer called out

<<Un—believable! Who would have imagined that the true identity of the Rias Gremory team's [Pawn], Mr. Black, who was hidden behind a mysterious veil until just now is actually Crom Cruach! It looks like this game will be worth watching since the legendary Evil Dragon is actually participating in this tournament as the Rias Gremory team's [Pawn]!>>

The man — Crom Cruach extended his hand and unleashed an extraordinary attack! In an instant, the area in front of him had been overwhelmed by an explosion, and the large special barrier that had been deployed over the entire marine area was dealt a devastating blow. With the single strike that Crom Cruach released — a colossal hole had opened up in the sky and the middle of the sea where cracks in the dimension itself could be noticed. Seawater from the field flowed down into the cracks of the dimension. Throughout the tournament, only god-class attacks had been able to cause such ridiculous damage to the game field's barrier…. Needless to say, not only did these opponents lack the strength to fight back, but five of them had already been retired in that instant. …So, Rias' [Pawn] is…Crom Cruach…! Sitting beside me, Saji was also astounded and completely lost for words. As for Vali, it seems that he anticipated Crom Cruach's participation, and he looked delighted to finally see him make an appearance. The announcer yelled out

<<T-The field has — been destroooyyyeeddd! That could be described as a godly blow! No, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to call it something beyond that! As another of the Dragon species, it is reminiscent of Hyoudou Issei-senshu's incredibly fierce cannon blast!>>

…Purely in terms of power, I was confident that I wouldn't lose to him. The problem was the number of times that that attack could be used, and how long that level of firepower could last. Ddraig said

[…That guy, Crom Cruach. He destroyed the field on purpose. Your previous battle must have given him some inspiration.]

Vali laughed.

“Fufufu, he must’ve done that deliberately. I wonder if Crom Cruach himself decided to do that, or whether it was an order from the leader. Either way, it seems like there’s some kind of mutual understanding.”

“Is that a challenge from Crom to me?”

When he heard me say that, Vali pleasurably said

“It was for probably for me and the other strong contestants to see. This is very interesting. Indeed, this how it should be. This is the essence of this tournament.”

…Just to show off, he had erased the field.

“Ddraig, answer me honestly. —Can I fight that guy as I currently am?”

In response to my question, Ddraig answered

[Of course, you’ll be able to fight with him as long as you undergo Dragon Deification. It’ll definitely be a good fight. —But.]

…I knew what was next even without it having to be said.

“If there was a time limit, then it’s out of the question, huh. …Seriously, Rias has actually taken in such an unexpected team member.”

Also, even if I did undergo Dragon Deification, it would be impossible for me to defeat him within the time limit. Ddraig continued

[Rias Gremory is rather conscious of you, partner, which is why she pulled Crom Cruach into her team as a [Pawn]. Of course, she probably persuaded him because of his relation to Gasper Vladi, and of course as a countermeasure in order to fight against the god-class beings and the Two Heavenly Dragons. Crom Cruach himself would gladly accept this proposal. To him, this arrangement would be like a dream.]

Although the real reason why Crom Cruach joined Rias’ team was unknown, there was definitely something between the two of them where their interests aligned. Rias herself could be very persuasive, so she could have coaxed him to join her team very cleverly. She was able to bring out everyone’s full potential during the early battles of the Occult Research Club, and on top of that, there was also Gasper who had the power of Balor, which she could have used as a means of persuasion…. Having Gasper with the power of Balor and the strongest Evil Dragon Crom Cruach, this was a truly terrifying combination! —And then, someone else entered the room.

“Ise-sama, I finally found you.”

After Ravel came in, she was followed by Asia, Xenovia, Irina, Rossweisse-san and Bova (mini Dragon form).

“Ah, Ravel, sorry for coming here to see them without saying anything to you.”

“No, it’s fine…. The problem is—”

Ravel’s gaze turned towards the rampaging Crom Cruach on the screen.

“Ah, what are we going to do about this now, I wonder.”

Looking at the screen, I could only make a bitter smile as Ravel frowned.

“Rias-sama’s team not only has Crom Cruach—”

<<Whoa! Appearing at this time is—! The rumoured black beast! Bearing the power of the legendary Evil God Balor, Gasper-senshu has released darkness into an extremely wide area!>>

Along with the announcer’s exclamation, Gasper transformed into a monstrous black beast and released a darkness that engulfed the entire sea, causing all of the opponents’ attacks to be swallowed by the darkness. And then, several players were dragged into the darkness—. The next scene on the display showed a small island which floated on the sea. On it was — a girl who resembled Freed — Lint Selzan, who had just entered a fierce close-quarters fight with the opponent’s swordsman. After all, it was the peerage of an ultimate-class Devil, so their swordsmanship was correspondingly good. Lint Selzan’s sword of light landed a blow on her opponent, but she was immediately injured by a counter-attack from her opponent. Lint Selzan then increased her distance from them by leaping backwards. The person who appeared at that position was — Valerie. In Valerie’s hand — she took out a Holy Grail, and a sparkling white liquid overflowed from the goblet. It poured down onto Lint Selzan’s wound — and the wound disappeared as though it had never existed in the first place!

<<What happened!? The ability that Valerie-senshu used to cure her comrade’s wound is amazing—!>>

The announcer also praised the ability of Valerie’s Sacred Gear. Indeed, that was the new method of recovery for Rias’ team! Valerie used [Sephiroth Graal] to heal a person’s injuries. Although she couldn’t keep up with Asia in terms of speed, a means of recovery was highly important in the game. The recovered Lint Selzan produced purple flames from her entire body, and the sword in her hands was set alight. The sword of purple flames released a flaming aura towards the opposing swordsman! The injured opponent simply could not withstand the pain!

<<Lint Selzan-senshu’s purple flames have swallowed her opponent! Her opponent is unable to resist at all and has been retired!>>

Just as the announcer had said, the player who had been struck by Lint Selzan’s purple flames immediately disappeared into the light of retirement. …That girl also has the power of a Longinus. Gasper, Valerie, Lint Selzan…. Rias had already added three powerful Longinus wielders into her own team. Naturally, the activity of the new Rias team extended beyond just that. Rias’ Power of Destruction completely overwhelmed the opposing [King] (ultimate-class Devil). The opposing [King] had already been wounded by Crom Cruach’s initial blow, and wasn’t an a challenge for Rias at all. Beside her, a Fallen Angel-mode Akeno-san released an enormous lightning dragon to take down the opposing [Queen]. Kiba had also defeated the opposing [Knight] in the blink of an eye while Koneko-chan used Kasha in her Shirone-mode to incinerate the opposing [Bishop].

<<Retired>>

<<Retired>>

<<Retired>>

The other side's players were forced to retire one after the other. The victory of Rias' team was already set in stone. Rias herself also had repeated victories, and was undefeated so far. Rias then forced the opposing [King] to surrender. Vali joyfully said

"Without you guys, the team of Rias Gremory seems to have shed its skin, and they've been well-received in this tournament…they're a perfect combination of the existing and the new members. Using everyone's characteristics to their fullest potential is a bold approach…"

But even so, what was the true motive behind revealing Crom Cruach's true identity at a time like this? Could it be possible that she wanted to demonstrate her overwhelming power to the tragic players who had already been suppressed by the power of god-class beings so as to further reduce their motivation? Nonetheless, seeing these guys, as well as the debut of the legendary Evil Dragon would cause a lot of people to withdraw. In fact, while the tournament had progressed to this point, there were teams that dropped out every day. I lowered my head as I said

"…Well, it might be a good idea to increase our fighting power for the next match as well."

When I muttered that, Ravel whispered to me

(Ise-sama, there's something that I'd like to discuss with you on that matter.)

(Really? Do you mean we're going to use that girl?)

Upon listening to my question, Ravel nodded. Hoho, there was actually another candidate aside from Elmenhilde.

<<The match is oooovveeer! The Rias Gremory Team is victorious! In the face of overwhelming firepower, even an ultimate-class Devil is unable to fight back!>>

It was the announcement to declare Rias's victory. Rias had gained yet another win. …I can't lose to her either! Vali looked fairly satisfied as he watched the victory of Rias' team and Crom's appearance, and then got up to leave the viewing area.

"Well, I should also go back now I guess."

"Ah, I'm also going to go."

Saji followed Vali to leave.

"Ara, Vali, Saji, are both of you are going home?"

When I asked that, Saji replied with

"The match is over, and we're not going to go back to fish again, so I wouldn't want to disturb you guys. After all, we are competing teams, and we're going to have a match with you soon."

"That's right. —Saji, I'm not going to lose to you this time."

"Hehe, that's my line, Hyoudou."

Saji and I shook hands. Although we were good friends who could go out fishing

together, we had to make things clear when it came down to the things like this. This time, I was definitely going to win. Vali smiled.

“Going with the flow of things, it looks like the Hyoudou Issei team is going to have to reinforce its fighting power. That’s something I’d welcome though.”

“Vali, you’ll make it to the tournament’s finals, right?”

After hearing that, Vali shrugged.

“That’s what I should be saying to you.”

Vali waved, and then left the room. —Just before he left, he said one more thing.

“We were interrupted halfway through fishing…. But I’ll bring along my two rookies next time. Bikou will be happy when I take those two off his hands since he’s taking care of them.”

…Rookies…ah, he was talking about the current Sha Wujing-chan and that pervert, the current Zhu Bajie. The latter of them was a complete pervert. I was also quite troubled on how to deal with him. In any case, it was not as though I disliked his invitation.

“Yeah, let’s go to a river in the mountains to fish next time.”

Vali and Saji raised their hands in agreement with my proposal as they left. …In the end, the answer to the matter of ‘enjoying’ battles was still unknown, and I didn’t pry into it too deeply with them…. Perhaps this was something that I had to discover for myself. Although it was a rather vague conclusion, this was what I told myself.

Part 4

Two days later.

After school, we stayed in our clubroom until the end of our club activities. Ravel said earlier that “There is a candidate to increase our fighting strength”. Today would be the day that we met the candidate…. So all of my team members (except for Bina-shi) had gathered in the clubroom, and we quietly waited. Kiba and the others had already left. Because it was a matter related to increasing the strength of our team, Bova was also present in the clubroom. Of course, it was not his usual large form, but his mini-dragon form. Kaa-san absolutely adored his mini-dragon form, and she had said “My, he looks just as cute as Rassei-chan!” while she treated Bova like a pet. I felt really sorry about that for Bova. As we waited in the clubroom, the first person who entered was Elmenhilde, she was wearing quite a lot of clothing and a dark hood since the sun was still out. Ravel said that there was still another person on the way, so we continued waiting — and then, another two people entered the room. One of them was the new Student Council member, Nakiri Kouchin Ouryuu. Among the Five Principal Clans, he was the next heir of the Nakiri clan. He was a second year student of Kuoh Academy who always seemed to have a cheerful atmosphere about him.

“Pardon the intrusion, members of the Occult Research Club.”

“Yo—, Nakiri — and Millarca-san.”

The other person was a female student who donned enough clothing to cover her entire body. She wore a hood and thick glasses. She also had a muffler wrapped around her neck, a jersey tied around her skirt, and wore gloves on both hands; this made her defence even more complete than Elmenhilde’s. She had tried to expose as little skin as possible. In fact, Millarca-san was a pure-blooded vampire who represented a major pillar of the Carmilla faction as a princess-sama of the Vordenburg family! That was why she tried to expose as little skin as possible. She was like Elmenhilde, so she was not a Daywalker, which made it very strenuous for her to be active during the day. Not only did she participate in Ajuka Beelzebub-sama’s ‘Game’, she also investigated the remaining Longinus wielders together with Nakiri — [Innovate Clear] [111] and [Telos Karma] [121]. The heavily dressed female student — Millarca-san leapt over to Elmenhilde as soon as she saw her. As the target of that, Elmenhilde seemed surprised by Millarca-san’s actions, but the two of them appeared to know each other.

“M-Millarca? Why are you here?”

“Is it that strange? I attend school here at Kuoh Academy, didn’t the motherland send news about it?”

Millarca-san stepped back a bit as she asked with an expression that seemed to convey a slight amount of disbelief.

“I know that. I was referring to the fact that this is Hyoudou Issei-sama’s team meeting place, right? Did you come to join?”

Millarca-san and Nakiri looked at each other, and then nodded.

“I suppose it’s something like a visit? I’m just tagging along though. They are the ones who want to meet senpai though.”

It wasn’t Millarca-san, but Nakiri who wanted to see me? But, Millarca-san said ‘they’. Did that mean there were other people who were coming here aside from Nakiri and Millarca-san? Nakiri scratched his cheek with a troubled expression.

“…Well I’m not sure how to say this, but suppose I came to visit senpai as there’s someone that wants to be introduced to you…. Basically, we wanted Hyoudou-senpai and Phoenix to meet someone.”

The way that he addressed Ravel as ‘Phoenix’ was rather refreshing. So a male classmate calls her ‘Phoenix’ huh. Hmm? No, wait. Since a moment ago, Millarca-san and Nakiri were saying something about ‘wanting to meet us’ and ‘introduce’. Originally, we came here to invite people over…but the other party actually wants to see us and be referred? At that time, Ddraig spoke to me

[…I have a bad feeling about this, partner.]

His voice was rather low. What’s happened to you, partner? —And then, there was a knock at the door. Another person stepped into the room. It was a beautiful lady with straight long blue hair! She was an incredible beauty who wore a matching navy blue skirt! It was needless to say that the person with blue hair was not a human; they were clearly someone from the occult side. Her entire body was doused with the colour of deep blue, and even her irises were dark blue. The woman looked around the entire clubroom, and then rested her gaze on me — to be more precise, on my left arm.

“Long time no see, Ddraig.”

The woman spoke towards my arm — to Ddraig in the Sacred Gear. And then, the gauntlet appeared on my left arm by itself rather naturally. The jewel glowed with light.

[—Tiamat. Ah, really…. I had a bad premonition about this, but I didn’t expect it to be you.]

—T-Tiamat!? One of the Five Great Dragon Kings!? Known as the strongest Dragon King, and the [Chaos Karma Dragon], Tiamat! I believe I did hear about Tiamat’s involvement in Beelzebub-sama’s ‘Game’…. I whispered to Ravel

(Today’s events…the candidates are Nakiri and Tiamat?)

(I was originally after Nakiri-san…but it only turned out like this because Nakiri-san said that there was someone who he wanted us to meet.)

I see, so Ravel originally sought Nakiri. And then someone acquainted with Nakiri wanted to see me. Moreover, it was Tiamat—. I never imagined that she would come to see us directly…no, she came to see Ddraig…. She was also in her human form! The blue-haired woman — Tiamat…san stroked her long hair as she sighed and said

“How unpleasant your words are. You obviously escaped from my hands quite a few times. After you became like this, you’ve always asked your host to run away as

soon as you detect my presence.”

[…N-Ngh.]

“Unfortunately for you, you were unable to run away this time. After all, I’ve already mastered a method to suppress my presence so that you won’t notice. What a wonder it is to live for so long.”

[…S-So that’s why I failed to notice it until you came all the way in here…]

Based on Ddraig’s tone of voice, it was possible to discern that he was not very good at dealing with Tiamat-san at all. But I finally understood why Tiamat-san had come to visit — she came to see Ddraig!

“…What’s wrong, Ddraig? Did something happen between you and this beautiful woman?”

I asked my partner. —But the one who replied was Tiamat-san.

“Before being sealed, the Welsh Dragon [131] asked to borrow some legendary items from me. He said it was to strengthen himself so that he could defeat the Hakuryuukou. After borrowing them, he started a big fight against Albion during the Great War between the Three Factions…as for what happened afterwards, I’m sure that you can also understand as the current host, right?”

After Tiamat-san sat down on the sofa in the clubroom, she then said

“So, Ddraig borrowed a bunch of treasures from me and acted on his own to get defeated along with Albion, and sealed into Sacred Gears as a result. Because Ddraig was eliminated, the treasures that I loaned out were all taken by human thieves and scattered around to every corner of the world.”

…Oh, so after borrowing these legendary items, he started a fight with Albion and never returned because both of them were turned into their present forms. Looking at it like this, I feel sorry for Ddraig.

[…Uuu, I-I’m sorry.]

Ddraig honestly admitted to it. But in front of me, Tiamat-san sneered coldly, and then made a request.

“I don’t care, just return them to me.”

[…I-I’m already in such a state, so I can’t return them even if I want to!]

Tiamat-san sighed and shrugged.

“I don’t know. You were the one who went and got yourself killed in a fight. The responsibility for that is still your own.”

Ah—, so Ddraig kept running away because he couldn’t return the treasures that he borrowed, and felt that he would be chased for it. Also, it was extremely difficult for him to recover the legendary treasures that had been stolen after being sealed into a Sacred Gear. However, that was one matter, and this was another.

“…Well yeah, you should return the things that you borrowed.”

I let my honest opinion slip from my mouth.

[Ah, even you too partner…!]

Surprised at my reaction, Ddraig seemed to be suffering. I mean, it isn't right to borrow someone's things and not return them…. It was also you who went off to pick a fight.

Seeing the interaction between me and Ddraig, Tiamat-san laughed after watching for a moment.

"Just as I said to Ddraig…ah, my proud collection now lies scattered in the treasuries of various factions…"

Tiamat-san sighed. —However, she revealed a bewitching and mischievous smile the next instant.

"So I came up with an idea. Since Ddraig is useless — then the host should take over the job. In other words, something like a loan guarantor."

Tiamat-san directed her eyes towards me. Aside from Tiamat-san, everyone else also directed their gazes at me.

…….

…….

…I pointed at myself. Tiamat-san nodded with certainty.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeehhh!"

I cried out in surprise! This isn't natural! W-W-Why is Ddraig's mess passed onto me!? It's clearly something that happened a long time before I was even born!

[Partner, I'm sorry…]

W-W-W-W-W-What did you say, Ddraig-san!? What are you asking me to do!? Is it even fair that you're free of your debt and you're leaving it to your partner!? Noooooooo, what's this about a loan guarantor, noooooooo! Tiamat-san smiled.

"Don't worry, even if host-kun is a high-class Devil and a big rich man, I won't directly deduct it from you, because that would be just too pitiful. So, there's one condition for me to forgive Ddraig."

Tiamat-san pointed at me with her finger and then said

"In exchange for forgiving Ddraig, when you obtain victory in the tournament, you must make your wish so that the entirety of my treasure collection that has been scattered amongst the factions is returned. As I recall, according to the size of the prized wish, the number that can be granted will change, right?"

In response to Tiamat-san's question, Ravel nodded.

"Y-Yes. If it's a small wish, then you can have a number equal to the number of your team's members, but if it is a demanding or large-scale wish, then you only get one."

Indeed, the prize for the tournament — would use the mystical power of all combined

factions to fulfil as many wishes as possible. Just as Ravel said, the number of permitted wishes could change as well. Because we've always just aimed for victory in the tournament, we never really considered our wishes, and didn't have a particularly large goal…. I see, Tiamat-san hopes that when we obtain victory that we'll help her retrieve those lost treasures. As for the managers, I don't know how much they'll be able to fulfil…but it seems as though this wish is within the realm of possibility. Tiamat-san continued

"In the meantime, I'll do my best to help you win. If it were possible, you could also invite me into your team, but I'm also part of the Rating Game's management. It isn't very good if you do so, don't you think? —So, let this kid join your team."

Tiamat-san pointed to Nakiri as she spoke. I see, so that's why Nakiri was here. When Ravel said that 'There is a candidate to increase our fighting strength', it seems she had intended for it to be Nakiri. With a complicated expression, Nakiri said

"—Anyway, that's the situation. …I've also been under Tia-san's care…so it's difficult for me to turn down her request."

Ooh, regardless of whether it was related to Beelzebub-sama's previous 'Game', or the investigation of the Longinus, it seems as though Nakiri was taken care of by Tiamat-san and owed a debt to her. Tiamat-san said

"If it's Ryuuta, then he should be able to help you. And as the next head of the Nakiri clan, he'll also be able to gain some valuable experience. This is a manager's recommendation, okay?"

"Is Ryuuta a nickname of Nakiri's?"

I was concerned by this unfamiliar name and decided to ask the person himself.

"…No, [Ryuuta] was before I succeeded [Ouryuu] [141] …it is my real name. Tia-san really likes that name, so that's why she calls me by it."

I see, so the name [Ouryuu] is the one given to the person who inherits the Sacred Beast of the clan.

"…Whether it's Ryuuta or Kouchin, you sure have a lot of names Nakiri."

I said. Every time I see him, it feels as though he's gained a new name or nickname so I'm not even sure what I should call him now.

"…Well, this is the fate of a person born into an old and traditional family. You can call me whichever is easiest for you, Hyoudou-senpai."

I'll go with [Nakiri] then, since that's the easiest one to remember. I asked Ravel

"Ravel, so Nakiri will be joining us?"

I confirmed with her whether or not we could have Nakiri join us as a new team member. Ravel took out a smartphone from her pocket and prepared to take a photo as she pointed the camera towards Nakiri.

"Very well than Nakiri-san, please allow me to measure you just a bit."

She then took a snap of Nakiri. This was one of the apps that the management provided to us for the tournament. By starting the app and then using it to take a photo, it was possible to clearly ascertain someone's value as a piece (according to the tournament's benchmark). Even for a Vampire that normally couldn't be photographed, it was still able to function under certain circumstances. Following that, Nakiri's most important result was revealed and Ravel appeared to be rather surprised upon seeing it.

"—What!? …Ise-sama, if Nakiri-san is evaluated according to tournament's benchmark as a [Pawn], then it's [5]! That number is far more than I expected…!"

"A human can reach [5]!?"

I was also greatly surprised and couldn't help but shout! According to the World Tournament's [Pawn] benchmark, he actually got a [5]! A value like this for a human was definitely surprising. I hadn't heard of him possessing a Sacred Gear either…. Indeed, he was worthy of being able to stand at the centre of this country's special ability user group — the heir of the Nakiri clan. There were also others who were surprised by this news — my team's [Pawn], Bova.

"…A human boy like this actually has an even higher value than me!?"

Tannin-ossan's son Bova had a value of [3] when judged as a [Pawn]. By the tournament's standards, [3] was already an immense value. After all, the tournament's benchmark had become rather strange after the inclusion of god-class beings.

"Both Ise and I are seventeen or eighteen year old minors. You can't judge people by their appearances you know, Bova?"

"Hmm, mmm, what you're saying is…. My [King], Xenovia-dono, and everyone, that was discourteous of me just then…"

Xenovia was able to say some pretty persuasive things sometimes. What she said was correct though. Ravel wrote a few things down in her notebook as she said

"However, just as Bova-san said, it's truly remarkable for a human to obtain a piece value of [5] for the tournament's [Pawn] benchmark. If this was calculated by the normal [Evil Pieces], then it would probably be even higher."

What an incredible person…. And then, I once again realised just what an unimaginable monster the [Pawn] of Rias' team, Crom Cruach was. If that guy was evaluated with the [Evil Pieces] system, let alone a [Mutation Piece], it might not even be possible for him to become a servant, I think? However, knowing him, he'd never lower himself to becoming a reincarnated Devil. …Has Crom's current strength already far surpassed the strength of Ddraig before he was sealed? That guy has never been defeated and has constantly been training…. Nakiri solemnly stood before me and said

"Although I've no plans to reincarnate as a Devil, I'm very honoured to be able to fight in the tournament as a member of Hyoudou-senpai's team. Since I'll be able to witness your all-out fighting that tears down corruption from such a close distance, I will definitely do my best as the [fist] of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth]."

Nakiri lowered his head to express his will to participate. Xenovia also stood by Nakiri's side with her hand on his shoulder. She then said to me

"Ise, I've sparred with him a few times before and I can say that his skill is astounding. As the current Student Council President of Kuoh Academy, I also highly recommend him."

Nakiri looked at Xenovia as he said

"…Kaichou, please don't sell me like a for-sale item. Also, please stop sparring with me to kill time…"

…It looks like Xenovia was taking good care of Nakiri. The overdressed Millarca-san then chimed in

"I would also like for Ouryuu to join! Although he's always daydreaming, he's actually a really capable kid!"

"…Millarca, hey, that doesn't count as support. And aren't you the one who's normally daydreaming?"

Upon hearing the words of his classmate, Nakiri seemed troubled as he pressed his hand against his forehead. From a teacher's perspective, Rossweisse-san said to me

"Nakiri-kun's normal academic attitude and results are excellent. If that wasn't the case, then he wouldn't have been able to become a member of the Student Council."

He always had a cheerful air about him, and he was good at both academics and athletics. …But, I see, so Nakiri is a part of my team now. After this he should tell me what his abilities are, though I'm rather happy to have another male and a junior on my team! The majority of my team is female, so it's rather helpful to have a male that I can easily communicate with! Bova…although he is male, he acts like an attendant so there is inevitably a sense of distance between us. He's a decent guy though. Bova and Nakiri seemed to be at odds with each other.

"Hey, I can't keep my mouth shut after hearing you say that. How dare you push me aside to call yourself the [fist] of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth]."

In order to get Bova to calm down, I said

"It's okay. Bova, you're umm yeah…. I'll be delighted if you could become my [fang]."

I casually said—.

"—What!"

And then Bova was moved to tears! He prostrated himself on the floor in his mini-dragon form!

"…I am deeply humbled. From now on, this Bova shall become My Lord's [fang]…!"

…Seriously, Bova always has such over-the-top reactions to everything I say and do….

"Raise your head, Bova! I've said it many times that you don't have to be like this!"

Amidst this scene, Tiamat-san confirmed that our conversation was over, and then stood up to walk towards the door.

“Very well then, I leave Ryuuta in your hands, Ddraig. I look forward to the good news from you guys. Ddraig, if you dare to run away again this time, I’ll roast you along with your host.”

[…Kuh.]

Hey, Ddraig. Tiamat-san just said that she’s going to roast me as well…! Just how is this going to end!?

[…I’m sorry, that’s all I can say. I was also once young…]

…Eh, so this also the fate that comes with the power of the Sekiryuutei. Oh well, I’ll just cross that bridge when we get to it.

[Uuu, partner. I’m sorry, I’m really sorry!]

It’s fine, I also gave you a lot of trouble because of [Oppai Dragon]. I’ve occasionally made you cry and relapse back into a child. Perhaps my errors are even graver than yours…. After Tiamat-san left, Ravel began to make various confirmations.

“Nakiri-san, what kind of position do you want in the team? There’s still a spare [Rook] position in the team. It’s quite easy to make positional changes depending on the game, so it doesn’t mean that it’ll be fixed after the decision is made.”

Ravel showed Nakiri the list of members, and after seeing it, Nakiri revealed a thin smile.

“Well, I choose to be a [Pawn] then. I heard that Hyoudou-senpai originally began as a [Pawn], so in that case, I’ll also start from there.”

…Hahaha, it’s actually a bit embarrassing to be respected to such a degree.

“Ise-sama, what do you think? I don’t have any other issues.”

I immediately answered Ravel’s question.

“I’m fine too, so, please become my [Pawn], Nakiri.”

“Yes. Alright! I will do my best as Hyoudou-senpai’s [Pawn]!”

Nakiri also seemed fired up. Now, I wonder what abilities you have? Like this, Nakiri became a [Pawn] of my team. As long as there were no positional changes, the [Pawn] pieces of my team were composed of Bova as [3] and Nakiri as [5]. Nakiri solemnly bowed his head again. He was really such a polite and well-raised kid.

“As such, my senpai, forgive my etiquette, but please take care of me from now on.”

And then all members responded this time.

“I never expected a new Student Council member to join, we’ll be counting on you!”

“The team is going to become rather lively now!”

Rossweisse-san seemed somewhat troubled.

“There are actually two members of the Student Council in the team…I’ll have to report back to the Gremory House that supports the school later.”

Since the next head of the Nakiri clan would be participating in the tournament, it was quite a bonus for them. However, Tiamat-san will probably deal with it…. Witnessing the current situation, there was an anxious person. —It was Elmenhilde.

“U-Umm! …A-Am I still not okay?”

Elmenhilde had already expressed her desire to ‘join the team’ before Nakiri. Although Ravel allowed her to practice with the team, she completely disagreed with letting her join the team as a member.

“Elmenhilde-san will also be considered. But if I don’t hear what your true intentions are, then a final decision cannot truly be made.”

In response to the phrase ‘true intentions’, Elmenhilde answered

“For the sake of the Carmilla faction, and for the motherland.”

“…”

Ravel didn’t say anything, and simply showed a troubled expression. This was probably just a courtesy as Ravel had already ascertained that her true intentions lay elsewhere. Upon our first meeting, she was a haughty pure-blooded vampire, but she had almost turned into a completely different person upon the next time that we met, and even her values had changed. It made one very curious to want to know what had happened. Ravel wanted to ascertain Elmenhilde’s true nature — as well as her determination to participate in the tournament. Before that was completely confirmed, she would not be allowed to participate. …I also want to know what her true intentions are. Since she wants to join the team, I’d like to hear what her thoughts are, even if it’s only a part of the whole. …That’s right, I should ask Millarca-san since she seems to be acquainted with Elmenhilde. And so I discreetly asked the overdressed Millarca-san

(Millarca-san, do you and Elmenhilde know each other?)

(Yes. We share our homeland, and we’ve known each other since childhood. But I never imagined that she would change so much after not seeing her for a while.)

…Indeed, from the perspective of someone who knew her from childhood, they felt that her personality had changed a lot. The crimson eyes beneath Millarca-san’s thick glasses revealed a hint of sorrow.

(The true intentions that Ravel-san wants to know about is something that Elme is still hiding. Although I’m aware, I hope that you’ll be hear it from herself, senpai.)

…I guess something must have happened in their homeland. In this way, while thinking about the secrets that Elmenhilde was hiding, we welcomed Nakiri Kouchin Ouryuu as a new member to our team at the same time—.

Notes

1. Kanji was Miniature Garden of Blue Innovation.
2. Kanji was Ultimate Karma.
3. Kanji was Sekiryuutei.
4. The kanji for Ouryuu is literally ‘Yellow Dragon’.

Life.3
Before the Decisive Battle

Part I

When our Devil's job for the day was over, and after I finished having a meeting with Ravel, I came to the large underground bath to cleanse my body. Asia and the others had already taken a bath earlier while I was at the meeting. Rias and the others had also finished their work early and returned home; they went to bed early as they planned to get up early the next morning. While I was scrubbing my body in the large bathing area, I noticed that someone had come in! When I turned around to look, Akeno-san had somehow crept up on me before I could even notice!

"Ufufu, shall we do this together?"

Akeno-san! The way that she appeared before me while completely supressing her presence gave me a major shock! Rias had also learned this technique and would also occasionally sneak up to give me a surprise! Akeno-san — needless to say, she was completely naked! Her extra-large size oppai bounced before my eyes, and I could even see her pink nipples! I stole dirty glances at them as I asked

"U-Umm, what is it? It's already this late, so shouldn't you be asleep, Akeno-san…?"

Akeno-san squeezed some body soap onto a towel and foamed it up as she said to me

"Ufufu, I also want to help wash my husband's back on occasion. My dear, your back must be so stiff, right?"

Akeno-san said in a diligent manner! Ever since I confessed to her, Akeno-san would occasionally call me 'husband' and 'dear', she basically addressed me as if we were already a married couple. She gave off the impression of a perfect young Japanese woman who did everything for her husband.

"T-Then, I'll leave it to you!"

Obviously, I had no reason to refuse, so I loudly asked Akeno-san to go ahead. Akeno-san laughed softly as she replied with

"Yes, my dear."

…The way she called me 'dear' made me feel both shy and embarrassed…but I was certainly very happy, although it's still a bit early! —Akeno-san began to wash my back from behind with a towel.

"…I feel so happy when I think that I'll be able to wash Ise-kun's back like this forever…"

The tone of Akeno-san's voice seemed rather accommodating

"Ise-kun, please raise your hand."

I followed Akeno-san's instructions to allow her to wipe down my arms and armpits…. Every time Akeno-san's body pressed against my own as she wiped me with the towel, I was able to feel the luscious and curvaceous sensation of Akeno-san's oppai. The feeling of her incredibly soft body as it pressed tightly against my

own was truly superb. After a while, Akeno-san asked a single question while she continued to wash my back from behind

“Shall I wash the front next?”

—What! T-This is a bit bad! I’m still a bit shy about this kind of thing!

“I-I can wash the front myself!”

Upon hearing me say this, Akeno-san’s expression became troubled.

“But, I cannot become a good wife if I don’t clean every part of my husband’s body.”

Akeno-san then moved in front of me! She stood in front of me with the towel in her hands — and she began to attentively scrub the front starting from my chest oooohh! Her oppai bounced in a beautiful rhythm before my very eyes!

“Ara ara, there’s no problem. I got a chance to see my husband’s naked body as well, so it’s absolutely fine.”

Speaking of which, we do see each other in the bath quite often! Yeah, yes, so it’s okay to look! But, being told this from an onee-san made me feel rather embarrassed!

“Then, next is — ufufu, please prepare yourself.”

Akeno-san’s hand — extended down towards my nether regions! Noooooo! I’m too embarrassed! Although it was very embarrassing, I also did have thoughts of wanting to try it since it was an unknown experience—. I made up my mind. No matter what happens, we’ll deal with it when it does happen!

Splish! Splash!

The sound of water came from behind us! Both Akeno-san and I looked over to see Ophis (loli version) and Lilith pop out from the bathtub.

“Tis’ my victory.”

“Lilith wins.”

Following that, Kunou also popped her head out from the bathtub. Kunou-chan gasped heavily.

“Fu—! Phis-dono and Lith-dono are no match for me!”

It appeared as though the three of them were competing in the bath to see who could stay underwater for the longest. —And then, Ophis and Lilith began to hum a song. It was a unique tune that I had never heard before…they seemed to be having a good time. Was it one that they had composed themselves? Because these three people had suddenly appeared, the pink atmosphere between Akeno-san and I disappeared as we looked at each other and then laughed—.

Part 2

As the days left until the match against the [Trump Card of Heaven] team rapidly went by, our training continued. This morning, Nakiri had also joined in with our training. After I finished our training session and took a bath, I went to the kitchen on the first floor. I grabbed a bottle of fruit milk out of the refrigerator and swiftly gulped it down, and only then did I realise that a rare guest was sitting in the living room. A girl with hair that was coloured a mix of black and white — Lint Sellzen was sitting on the sofa. The last time that I saw her, she was still wearing the outfit of a Church warrior — the female battle suit, but she was wearing Kuoh Academy's girls' uniform today. We were acquainted with each other after all, so I struck up a conversation with her.

"Umm, Lint…san, can I call you that?"

"No no, just Lint is fine, Sekiryuutei onii-san."

Hahaha, her tone was still so carefree. It was reminiscent of that bastard priest…but the one before my eyes was way cuter when compared to him.

"Did you come to see Rias?"

"That's basically how it is. Because Leader Rias told me to wait here."

This kind of situation happens because two teams are basically living under the same roof, huh.

"That outfit is…"

I asked because Lint-san was wearing Kuoh Academy's uniform. Lint-san stood up and straightened out her uniform as she said

"If one wants to move around this town during the day, then this uniform is more convenient when compared to a combat uniform."

That's certainly true. Rias' concerns were correct. …After all, at this time last year, there was a particular duo that paraded around on the streets wearing battle suits. Rias probably remembered the same thing as well. I sat down on the sofa as well, some distance away from Lint-san. I then asked

"I heard that you're from one of the training institutions run by the Vatican…from the place that trained the white-haired warrior…"

Freed and Siegfried of the Hero Faction, as well as the white-haired warrior that I encountered during our battle against the Church warriors. I had heard that quite a few warrior training institutions had been merged into the white-haired warrior's institution. They seemed to have had an internal reformation.

"Yes yes. Me, Freed-aniki ' ' ' and even Sieg-sensei all came from the same institution."

"Ah, sorry, I didn't mean to bring up Freed and the others…"

She didn't seem to mind as she waved her hand.

“Oh, please don’t mind. I am myself, aniki is aniki, and sensei is sensei. Also, they gave you quite a bit of trouble, so please allow me to apologise to you on behalf of that institution. I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

Lint-san’s tone still remained just as light-hearted while she lowered her head.

“It’s fine, you don’t need to apologise, so please don’t lower your head…. I don’t treat you like them, so you shouldn’t worry.”

After I said that, Lint-san immediately gave me a salute.

“Understood.”

And then, time flowed by as silence remained in the air between us. …I couldn’t think of a point or topic for conversation at all. It feels a bit wrong to ask her about the tournament, doesn’t it? Just as I racked my brain to think of something, it was actually Lint-san who spoke up first.

“I belonged to a place called the [Sigurd Institution]. Its purpose was to produce the [True Descendant of Sigurd], someone capable of wielding the Demonic Emperor Sword Gram from among those who had inherited the blood of the hero Sigurd.”

“So, you and Freed…are like siblings or relatives?”

“Well—, because we were born from multiple genetic patterns, you could call us siblings if you wanted to, and it would also be fine to simply consider us relatives…. By the way, because Freed-aniki and I share almost the exact same genes, you could even say that we’re the same person.”

“The same genes…”

…As a faithful believer of the Church and Vatican, it should be a violation of God’s teachings to interfere in the role of genetics. —However, there were examples such as Valper who had done such things until now. …This was a product of the so-called dark side of the Church. At present, things were more or less improving, as dangerous research institutes were being dissolved one by one, and researchers were gradually being introduced to other organisations. If this was the case, then it would explain why this girl had such a resemblance to Freed. They were white-haired children who had been born from the same genetic factors….

“In other words, I’m a test-tube baby. The institute artificially produced Sigurd’s descendants.”

Although she was speaking about it rather casually, it was actually a rather heavy topic!

“…There are people like Valper after all. Genetic modification huh…”

My face darkened. Kiba and Lint-san were on the same team, so he should already be aware of her circumstances…I wonder what Kiba thinks. Seeing me like this, Lint-san began to laugh with apparent amusement!

“Iya, hahaha, it was certainly chaotic before the Three Factions allied themselves, even the Vatican was no exception. Even if it’s a violation of our teachings, as long as the outcome is for the sake of Heaven and God, those fanatics will be driven by

savage greed to do such things.”

Is it really okay to talk about the dark side of the Church in such a carefree manner!? In a different sense, this girl is on the same level as Freed!

Lint-san looked up at the ceiling. Somehow, she seemed to have a distant look in her eyes.

“If you look only at the results, then Sieg-sensei was able to successfully draw out and wield Gram with one attempt. From that point in time, the long-cherished wish of the institute had already been accomplished. Even though Sieg-sensei enthusiastically said goodbye to the Vatican after that and then joined the ranks of terrorists.”

…Uh, that guy did join the terrorists. And in the end, he was defeated by Kiba who also came from the Church. When I realised this, I could only feel that it was the work of indescribable fate — that was all. Lint-san continued

“Because someone capable of handling Gram was produced, the institute changed its goal afterwards into something along the lines of ‘Let’s see how many descendants of the hero Sigurd we can try to make’. —Those were their original plans, but it’s truly such a peculiar fate that Gram has now ended up in the hands of Kiba-kyun-paisen[121].”

…Indeed, that guy Kiba, so she calls him ‘Kiba-kyun-paisen’ right now huh… speaking of which, the karma of Gram is certainly strange, given that its owner keeps changing. All of a sudden, Lint-san pointed her index finger up, and on top of it, a small purple flame appeared.

“Do you know about this?”

I nodded. This had already been officially explained to the members of [DxD] a while ago. What Lint-san possessed was the Longinus that Walburga of the Purple Flames once held — [Incinerate Anthem]. After we defeated Walburga, the Longinus was recovered by the Three Factions, and the Sacred Gear that was also a holy relic was kept by Azazel-sensei while he discussed its future use with Heaven’s side. And during the battle against Trihexa, although it was adjusted so that Valerie could use it, that was only a temporary measure. Originally, [Incinerate Anthem] would have wandered on to another host according to its own will. The next host of [Incinerate Anthem] was decided upon by the Sacred Gear itself, so it was a special existence in that regard. That was also the reason why Lint-san was able to handle it. The Sacred Gear chose her, and the Three Factions acknowledged that.

“When I obtained the purple flame, it just so happened to be when the Grigori was looking for someone who could use it. I went there to give it a go, so it was actually accidental, no, perhaps it was inevitable that I was selected.”

Lint-san seemed to speak in a rather jubilant manner. She erected her fingers, and then the purple flames flared up at each tip. Purple flames sparked from the tips of all five of her fingers, and after she brought her palm up, a bright and brilliant flame flickered there. …She was acting like this even though everything she had spoken about was so serious! I didn’t think that the Longinus would choose her precisely because she had such a frivolous personality!

“Speaking of which, your surname is Sellzen…is that a name that they gave you when you were still in the institution?”

That was my question. I already knew that she and Freed shared the same genes, but why was their surname the same as well? If the name Freed was brought up, he was probably the most troublesome shitty priest to the Church and the Devils. Combining Lint-san’s face along with that name, it was quite easy for people’s alarms to go off as they suspected her of having a relation to Freed, so it shouldn’t be a good thing to her. After Lint closed her hand, the flame disappeared from her palm.

“Hmm, well, there are various meanings in it. As I share the same genes, I want to carry on the name of the deceased Freed-aniki, and also to atone for the vicious crimes that aniki committed.”

“I see.”

…To atone for that guy’s crimes huh. Though there isn’t really a need for Lint-san to do so…. She doesn’t seem like a bad girl. Both Azazel-sensei and Heaven had entrusted the Longinus to her, and she had also joined Rias’ team, so it only seemed natural that she couldn’t be a bad person. The next problem though was what kinds of things this girl had already done in the past. There was no clear answer to this question. Ravel had already done some research, but there was basically no information that could be confirmed. Looking at it from this perspective, did she actually belong to a secret division like assassination? Or was she a spy that travelled between various countries? Neither Xenovia nor Irina recognised her, so she didn’t seem to be a warrior who fought on the front lines. So I wanted to use this opportunity to ask her about this issue.

“Ise…and Lint Sellzen huh.”

Just at this time, Xenovia and…Irina appeared in the living room.

“Ara, what a coincidence. Were you two chatting?”

Irina asked. After Lint-san saw Xenovia and Irina, she spoke to them in a rather emotional manner.

“Oooh, if it isn’t Quarta-paisen and Shidou-paisen. I would love to try having a girls’ talk with other female warriors.”

Xenovia and Irina looked at each other, and then their eyes shone like crystals as they expressed their passionate interest in the matter. Xenovia put her hands on top of Lint-san’s shoulders as she said

“Hoho, now this is interesting. There are a lot of things I want to ask you. First off, how old are you?”

“I’m seventeen this year.”

Ah, so one-year younger huh. Well, I did guess that we were roughly the same age based only on appearances. Irina seemed overjoyed upon hearing this.

“Younger? That’s nice isn’t it? Yes, as your senior, I’d really like to know more about my junior!”

Xenovia raised her arm up as she said

“Alright! Before Master Rias comes, we should have a good chat as fellow compatriots! I’ll also introduce you to Asia upstairs!”

“Good idea! Asia and…if Sister Mirana also came, then we could have an even merrier congregation as fellow believers!”

“Ooh, this feeling, do you mean I can make friends? Iya, I’m so grateful.”

Like that, Xenovia and Irina took Lint-san over to Asia’s room. I was left alone in the living room. I was unable to ask Lint-san about what her former affiliation was. … Church Trio, you have to return Lint-san when Rias comes back, okay? Though, just as Irina said, Asia, Xenovia, Irina, Mirana-san and Lint-san were five girls of similar age from the Church who had somehow gathered close by. It might be good if they can form a small group. Just as I thought that, Ravel sent me a detailed schedule from outside. The match was approaching — and so our final preparations were now beginning.

Part 3

The next day—.

I went to the large training space set up in the underground of the Gremory territory, and began our special training before the match with my team members. Incidentally, this space was a different space to the one that the Gremory peerage used before. In order to celebrate my promotion to a high-class Devil, the Gremory house specifically prepared a dedicated training space for me. It felt as though they really took care of me, and though I felt as though I was imposing too much on them, Ravel said to me

“You must accept it!”

Hence, the space that was supposed to be my exclusive training area — had now become the training space for the Hyoudou Issei team. This time, I was here with my team’s new member, Nakiri, to practice with him.

“Hyoudou-senpai, please spar with me.”

“Alright, no problem.”

Before the training, we saluted each other. I changed into my Balance Breaker form and equipped my armour, while Nakiri was dressed in a long-sleeved shirt for athletics. Nakiri stood in front of me like that with the stance of a normal athlete — of course, it certainly wasn’t as simple as just standing there. A thick touki surrounded his body, and as expected of someone who had formed a contract with the Sacred Beast [Ouryuu], he emitted bursts of a dragon’s majestic aura. The Sacred Beast [Ouryuu] was said to govern the ‘earth’. From this ‘earth’ — Nakiri borrowed ‘ki[131]’ from the dragon’s veins which flowed through the earth, and added his own touki to it. Depending on the richness of the land, and whether or not other conditions were optimal, it was possible to borrow almost an endless amount of ‘ki’.

The power of Nakiri in front of me—. Nakiri used his touki to continually increase the physical abilities of his body, so his attack, defence and speed greatly sharpened, and then he charged towards me at high speed! Nakiri’s speed totally surprised me. His speed was possibly greater than a high-class Devil’s, and Nakiri charged at me with this speed! I easily evaded, but Nakiri jumped up — and in the process destroyed the ground by puncturing it with a large crater! Simply through the enhancement of touki, he had boosted the power of his legs to such a degree! I flew upwards, and then Nakiri hurled a ball of dragon’s aura towards me! So he’s good at melee as well as mid and long distances! He would occasionally leap towards the air in order to shrink the distance between us so that he could attack me — I endured heavy blows even through my armour. But I was still capable of handling something of this extent! Because he was able to engage in melee combat with me face-to-face, we would sometimes engage in close-quarter brawls with our fists and legs. I was surprised that Nakiri was able to withstand my punches. His touki had actually enhanced his physical defences to such a level. He was truly powerful as a pure human to be able to possess such strength. But, being able to spar with someone like him from the younger generation made me really happy. I also had this kind of training with Gasper, and I felt rather happy about it back then too. Because of the

tournament, I was unable to train with Gya-suke though, so I felt a bit lonely. Nakiri was also great at melee combat. I was truly delighted! It was also a fighting style using touki that was similar to Koneko-chan and Sairaorg-san. By practising with Nakiri, it meant that I would have a good idea of what I would be facing if I had to go up against Koneko-chan or Sairaorg-san.

Some distance away was the mock battle between the swordswomen Xenovia and Irina. Asia and Rossweisse-san were both exploring techniques for demonic energy and magic. —I was also able to see Elmenhilde in a corner wearing a sporting outfit…. She was doing basic physical training, and until she could meet Ravel's expectations, she had continued to run without any complaints. Ravel was also running with her side by side. Ravel often trained herself in secret, so she should have a fair amount of stamina, right? But she had always said that stamina was a manager's worth. She was always a great model for the makings of a perfect manager! Before I knew it, Nakiri and I had begun to converse with each other at the same time. Topics — were varied. Indeed, I do have to have a good chat with the newcomers first. We were currently talking about Lint-san.

"I see, so that side's [Knight] also has such circumstances."

"Well, I'll ask about where she used to belong another time."

I dodged Nakiri's kick, and then moved forward to throw a punch at Nakiri. To be honest, Nakiri was very durable. Nakiri said to me

"I heard that senpai continually engaged in mock battles with Kiba-kyun-senpai. And Kiba-kyun-senpai is an outstanding swordsman as well. I hope to have the opportunity to spar with him."

"…Say, the way you call him 'Kiba-kyun-senpai', is that supposed to be popular right now?"

I asked with slight confusion. Lint-san had also called him 'Kiba-kyun-paisen' before. Nakiri replied

"Ah, among the second-year female students, the name 'Kiba-kyun-senpai' became popular at some point. So that's why the second-year male students also started calling him that. Shortening it, it becomes 'kyun-pai'. …And he's called that in other places too."

…Being called 'kyun-pai' huh…. Kiba, just how far is your popularity in school taking you to? Bova watched the mock battle between me and Nakiri from the side, while writing notes down.

"I see…so Rias Gremory-sama's [Knight]-dono's name is 'Kiba-kyun-senpai' huh…"

"Bova, you don't have to write that down…"

Before our match against Dulio, we continued to train in this manner.

Then, after training, all members of our team gathered together for a meeting. Everyone gathered in one corner of the training space, and we began a meeting with Ravel in the centre. After our daily decisions for the match were made, we continued to discuss the fact that the characteristics of reincarnated Angels were based on their cards — and the effect produced by their poker combinations. Today, we once again

gained a deep understanding of it. But we were unable to find a good battle strategy, and sure enough, it became an unknown obstacle—.

"…Their supervisor."

Ravel muttered with a dissatisfied look. Ravel took out information on the opposing team's supervisor — a file which included Rudiger-san's photo.

"—Rudiger Rosenkreutz-sama. Among the human reincarnated Devils, he's the only one who holds a high ranking in the Rating Games. Named the [Upsetting Sorcerer], he's one of the most powerful players in the Underworld."

Bova also nodded in agreement.

"Indeed, that man's strategies and power are so incredible that even the Champion was one step away from defeat."

He was actually able to pressure that Diehauser Belial…. I had fought against The Champion in Agreas, and I was no match for him back then. However, a person's strength was not an absolute factor in the Rating Games….

"He was originally a member and the founder of the magician's organisation known as [Rosenkreutzer]. But prior to becoming a Devil, he was not a particularly outstanding magician…he could simply be described as an advanced sorcerer."

Bova continued

"I also heard a few things about Rudiger-shi from my father. He used to be a [Bishop] for the Head of the House of Mammon, one of the [Extra Demon] houses."

Ravel nodded.

"After reincarnating into a Devil, he made many achievements, and then rose to become a high-class Devil…but that man's heroic tales only began when he started participating in the Rating Games."

…So he became prominent after taking part in the Rating Games huh. Bova spoke with a bitter expression

"Ever since he started participating in the Rating Games, he immediately began to upset many higher ranked teams, and in just a few years he had reached the top ten. Father once had a match with him…his team was very difficult to face."

…I see, Tannin-ossan had also said that he was a difficult opponent. Speaking of which, Tannin-ossan was not participating in this tournament.

"Did ossan win?"

Hearing me ask that, Bova answered me seemingly ashamed

"…Although he has won on some occasions, most of them were losses. When he spoke about the game, father's bitter expression touched me deeply."

Compared to ossan's expression, Bova's expression was probably far bitterer. Ravel said

"When my older brother, Ruval-oniisama spoke of Rudiger-sama, he also had a bitter

expression.”

…He was someone who had made waves not only in the Underworld, but also in the magician community of the human realm, and he was not participating in this tournament directly, but rather as a supervisor.

“…Although he was originally a human, as a Devil, he’s actually become the supervisor of the most outstanding Angel team. This obviously raised many questions.”

Xenovia raised her hand, and then mentioned her doubts

“Then what is the reason for their cooperation? If there’s no reason, then it’s impossible for them to cooperate, right? I don’t think the Angels simply begged him unilaterally.”

Ravel rubbed her chin as she spoke

“Although we don’t know what happened between the two of them, it’s possible that the purpose or goal that Rosenkreutz-sama and Dulio-sama want to achieve is the same, and that’s why they’re working together.”

Irina tilted her head as she asked

“Then what exactly is it?”

No one was able to answer this question. …If they didn’t trust each other, and their aims did not align, then he couldn’t have become the Angels’ — Dulio’s supervisor. …What was the relationship between Dulio and Rudiger-san? While my thoughts still lingered on the captain of [DxD] — a teleportation magic circle suddenly appeared in our training space. The only people who knew about this place were obviously those of us who were present, and the new Gremory team! Moreover, the symbol on the magic circle was one that I had never seen before! We were immediately put on alert, but Ravel stepped forward and reached her arm out sideways to restrain us.

“Actually, there will be an advisor coming over this time…or perhaps it would be better to say that they’re forcing their way in…”

The person who appeared from the magic circle was — a beauty wearing a high-cut formal dress! Based on her appearance, she appeared to be in her late twenties! In terms of special characteristics — she had two horns protruding from her head, and long wavy cherry-blossom coloured hair. Most importantly, her well-endowed bust and slim waist gave her body a perfect charm! I knew this person! After all, I’d seen her several times in magazines and TV shows related to the Rating Games! I recalled that she was formerly ranked second in the Rating Games! The strongest female Devil, Roygun Belphegor-san! Roygun-san greeted us with a sweet smile.

“Good day, Sekiryuutei and members of his team. I’m Roygun Belphegor.”

“W-W-Why is the former second-ranked player of the Rating Games here!?”

I was so astonished that even my eyeballs popped out of their sockets! A while ago, after the Champion’s announcement, she had been found guilty of using the [King] piece without authorisation. But she quickly admitted to the truth, and during the [Evil Dragon War], she swiftly suppressed other high-ranking players who had also

illegally used the [King] piece. Xenovia said

“I remember now, after you were found guilty of using the [King] piece, you were stripped of all of your titles from the Games, and you’re no longer able to directly participate in matches…”

Roygun-san nodded in affirmation and shrugged.

“The function of the [King] piece was also suspended. In addition, the House of Belphegor was chased after, and removed of their status as ultimate-class Devils. We’re now just high-class Devils.”

…The person herself didn’t try to hide anything. Suppressing some of the chaos in the Underworld but still stripped of various titles, and even her status as an ultimate-class Devil was no exception…. This was just one of the things that had so much political background involved that it was difficult for us to imagine…. Roygun-san turned her gaze towards Ravel.

“Ruval-kun has been helping me look for a new job. Coming here was one of them.”

Ravel nodded with a complicated expression on her face.

“…Indeed that is so. My older brother — Ruval-oniisama said that he was leaving Roygun-sama to us…”

It was a request from the eldest son of the Phoenix family, and the next head of the house. Well, so this so-called advisor is going to be Roygun-san? Seeing my doubtful expression, Roygun-san laughed in a cynical manner.

“That’s right. I’ve got a lot of free time on my hands. The Rating Games were my only source of fun and they’ve been taken away from me, so my life has naturally become rather depressing.”

Roygun-san approached us and then picked up the documents to read without consulting any of us.

“You guys are going to fight the team that Rudiger is supervising, right? Although I can’t directly become a part of your strength, in the meantime, I’ll hand over all of the game data that I’ve recorded to Ruval-kun’s little sister.”

Roygun-san snapped her fingers to make a magic circle appear, from which various documents and papers emerged. Roygun-san continued

“This is additional information.”

Ravel reached out to take the documents and confirm their contents.

“Roygun-sama, I’m grateful that we’ve been able to obtain such valuable game data from you. In this case, we’ll be able to compare this against the information we have on the [Brave Saints] to consider our strategy for the match.”

I see, so this is how our advisor would be helping us. Roygun-san sighed deeply.

“I can’t become your supervisor. After all, I’m still under surveillance and can’t act freely.”

…Roygun-san as our supervisor huh. If such a glamorous onee-san could become our supervisor, then I'd definitely work hard! However, Ravel was still in charge of our strategies for now. I trusted in Ravel while taking up the heavy responsibilities of being a [King]. I made that confirmation once again in my mind just as Roygun-san approached me, and she came super close!

"…But then again, ufufu."

While Roygun-san carefully surveyed my face, I could smell an alluring scent in my nostrils…. Roygun-san lifted my chin with her supple fingers.

"W-What is it?"

In response to this onee-san's gesture, I was unable to stop my heartbeat from flying out of control! Then, a seductive smile emerged on Roygun-san's face as she said to me

"Sekiryuutei…you have a really cute face. To be honest — I like it."

—What! L-L-L-ikes m-m-m-meee!? I couldn't help but feel shocked, and my mind was instantly thrown into disarray…after I understood the meaning of that sentence, my face instantly turned red! Why did I let someone see me with such an embarrassing reaction, aaaaahhh! B-But! Being told that by such a beautiful onee-san at such a close distance, m-my small heart simply can't endure it! All of the girls who witnessed this scene before their eyes became anxious.

"""""""—What!?"""""""

That single sentence from Roygun-san had triggered a strong reaction from Asia, Xenovia, Irina, Rossweisse-san and Ravel! Everyone looked nervous. Ravel pulled on my wrist to create distance between me and Roygun-san. She also shivered as she said

"…How careless. Now that I recall, there were such rumours about Roygun-sama."

Xenovia asked

"W-What rumours? What happened, Ravel!?"

"…Roygun-sama likes those younger than her. Especially human males from those in their teens to those in their twenties!"

W-What splendid news! She likes younger men! And teenagers are also okay! Aren't I flawlessly in the strike zone then!? To be targeted by such a wonderful onee-san, I began to do a small celebratory dance in my mind! Roygun-san tilted her head slightly and asked with a smile

"Ufufu, does the Sekiryuutei not like older women?"

"N-No, h-how could that be possible!"

"But from your perspective, I'm an old lady. I'm an old lady who's over a hundred years old."

"A-Absolutely not! I can't tell at all! I simply think that you're a beautiful onee-san in her early twenties!"

I wouldn't think of her as an old lady! Since I knew about the characteristics of Devils, more or less…a minor thing such as a gap of a hundred or so years is perfectly understandable! Hearing my confession, Roygun-san revealed a heartfelt smile.

"You sure say some really comforting words. Although I'm not too familiar with the feeling of human ageing, I can still tell that you're complimenting me."

…However, the stinging gazes upon me were also a reality. Asia seemed to be pouting, while Xenovia, Irina and Rossweisse-san were glaring at me with half-open eyes! Ravel was even tightly holding onto my arm with a stance to show she wouldn't back down against the former second rank as she said

"I won't give him to you."

Roygun-san giggled as she watched the situation unfold before her eyes…. It was possible to see her tolerance to this as an adult! —At this time, Roygun-san changed the topic and said

"However, in any case, since Rudiger has taken up the role of supervisor, that reincarnated Angel team has become a powerful enemy that cannot be underestimated. After all, among the former human high-class Devils, he's the only one to be feared. Ufufu, you guys shouldn't be careless."

After saying that, she turned around and made a transportation magic circle. It looked like she was returning. Roygun-san waved her hand.

"I'll cheer for you guys. But, no matter what the outcome is, you should enjoy the match, okay? Also—"

Just as Roygun-san was in the midst of disappearing into the light of the teleportation, she turned around and winked.

"I will be watching closely to see how far your team can make it to Sekiryuutei — ♪"

We watched as she teleported away. I wasn't sure about whether to feel happy or pressured about that…. Nonetheless, I am looking forward to more refreshing encounters like this!

Part 4

The day before the match—.

I visited Beelzebub-sama's research facility. I didn't come here to seek out Azazel-sensei this time, it was Beelzebub-sama who said that he wanted to 'check'. To check — this meant an investigation of the [Evil Pieces] in my body. Beelzebub-sama created a small magic circle and placed it in front of my chest, and just like he did in the past, he was able to see my [Evil Pieces]. As Beelzebub-sama examined them, he nodded slightly.

"Hmm, so it's just as I thought."

"W-What is it?"

"The [Evil Pieces] in your body — the [Pawn] pieces have all transformed into [Mutation Pieces]. It's probably the effect of [Dragon Deification]."

—What! …All of my [Pawn] pieces have finally turned into [Mutation Pieces]…! So it's probably because of [Dragon Deification], right? Beelzebub-sama continued to turn the magic circle to examine my pieces.

"The combination of eight [Mutation Pieces] on top of the unparalleled [Dragon Deification] could be described as a fearsome phenomenon. Your form truly does have the power to change the world."

"But I still cannot fully unleash that power at the moment…"

In order to prevent my body from breaking down, although I was able to draw out a powerful energy from my body after exhausting it to a certain degree, I felt quite uneasy using it. However, Beelzebub-sama made an unexpected remark.

"Well, I can already foresee that you'll be able to fully master it."

"Beelzebub-sama, are you serious!?"

"If you want to use all of that power well --- it will take a long time to reach that level. But to overcome the time limit and sustain its use for as long as possible in terms of stamina, I don't think it'd be strange if you were already capable of that. After all, you have all of the necessary factors within you."

Beelzebub-sama raised his index finger and said

"First of all, Ophis' retrieved power — Lilith."

"…You mean I have to borrow power from her?"

Lilith was always at home, either watching TV or playing games, or perhaps busily snacking on various things. Beelzebub-sama continued

"To be more precise, it is required for Ophis and Lilith to resonate, or perhaps for them to coordinate. Based on my examination, you cannot fully use [Dragon Deification] at the moment, not so much because your basic physical abilities are lacking, but because Ophis' power has been separated and her original strength

cannot be fully used."

This was the series of events triggered by Cao Cao and Samael. That led to Ophis' power being taken away.

"…Well, if you can make Lilith and Ophis resonate, then you'll be able to…"

I suddenly thought of something bad.

"B-But, if that happens, is it possible that one of the two will disappear?"

At present, regardless if it was Ophis or Lilith that disappeared, the entire household would feel lonely, and I didn't want that to happen. Beelzebub-sama said

"This is a problem of their own. If there is a need to return to their original state, then that's what they have to do. If there's no need for that, then the status quo can be maintained. Fufufu, I presume that as long as neither you nor Vali Lucifer wish for that to happen, then they won't assimilate. She — this Dragon God seems to have already devoted her heart to the Two Heavenly Dragons."

I hoped that they would continue to remain my friends and family forever. If it was something that they wished for on their own, then I would not have a choice. Beelzebub-sama sighed as he said

"Well, this is a matter best left to them to resolve. …What concerns me is something else."

Beelzebub-sama raised another finger as he said

"—Great Red's power is embedded within your body, it is a power that lies dormant within you and has never been awakened."

"…Great Red's power?"

My body was once destroyed during the Demonic Beasts Riot, but using a piece of Great Red's flesh, it was completely remade. This was what Beelzebub-sama meant. Beelzebub-sama then said

"Former Governor Azazel-dono previously mentioned your power — BxB, CxC, DxD, perhaps the various changes after this have modified your abilities. If you could use the eight [Mutation Pieces] to unleash the power of Ophis and Great Red, then it is possible for you to fully master [Dragon Deification] and attain an even more powerful form — AxA could be used. I think that this is the final answer that you will arrive at as the product of the [Ouroboros Dragon] and [True Red Dragon God Emperor]."

—Ophis, Great Red. This was the possibility that could be achieved by liberating the power of both of those two.

"AxA huh. The answer that I'll obtain by releasing both Ophis' and Great Red's power…. But, it isn't going to be ExE? I thought that it would feel more suitable if the name was a reference to the organisation that is to be set up in the future."

According to the order, it should be ExE…AxA as the final answer doesn't make sense. Beelzebub-sama seemed to think of something regarding ExE….

“In that regard, Former Governor Azazel-dono has already given an answer. But it is not yet time for it to appear before you. However, there will come a day when it shall appear before you.”

…It’s not time yet? Hmm — mmm, I wonder what it is. Maybe it will take some time. Beelzebub-sama said

“In any case, you should be able to awaken a glimpse of that power in this tournament. After all, this is a tournament where even god-class beings are participating, so common sense has been thrown out of the window.”

“…I think my next match is a key one.”

“The team of reincarnated Angels that Dulio Gesualdo leads, along with Rudiger Rosenkreutz as their supervisor. Since you’re participating in this tournament and plan to compete in the original Rating Games, he’s someone that you’re bound to encounter.”

Beelzebub-sama ended his examination, and released the magic circle. He looked at the ceiling as he said

“Rudiger…he’ll use tactics that are completely different to the ones that you and Rias Gremory use.”

“…I have also seen the recordings of his previous games…he bears some resemblance to Sona-senpai, but there are some fundamental differences.”

Having watched Rudiger-san’s previous game recordings…he didn’t win by relying on power, but through clever tactics to manipulate opponents in the palm of his hand to overwhelm them. However, that was where it differed from Sona-senpai’s methods. Using tactics and strategy to eliminate the opponent’s combat power, both of them were very similar in that regard…. Beelzebub-sama then said

“They are indeed alike in the way that they aim for their opponent’s weaknesses. — However, Rudiger is a Devil far more devilish than other Devils.”

“You aren’t referring to malice or evil, right?”

“Rizevim’s claim huh. That is nothing but a negative aspect to be found in any mythology. This also rings true for humans. I’m not talking about that, but rather his ability to confuse opponents, and deceive others. Rudiger’s style of play fully reflects this.”

Having said so much already…perhaps he had said too much; Beelzebub-sama ended the subject and took a deep breath.

“If I give you too much advice, it’ll be a dereliction of my duty as a member of the tournament’s managing committee. Even meeting with you in private like this is close to being taboo…. The rest is up to your own investigations. Rudiger Rosenkreutz and Dulio Gesualdo, having both of them as opponents is extremely difficult…but there’s no point in saying that now is there?”

“Yes! You certainly don’t have to say anything more! So, I will work my very hardest to defeat them!”

That’s right! No matter who my opponent is, I’ll definitely give it everything that I’ve got to obtain victory! It won’t be the first time that I’m up against a tough opponent. Let nature take its course and everything will turn out for the best! Hearing my declaration of victory, Beelzebub-sama broke into a smile.

“Fufufu, very good.”

But, AxA huh. The resonance of Ophis and Lilith, as well as the release of Great Red’s power—. It seems like I still have room to become stronger…next, I should explore that path. After returning home, I should talk with Ravel and Ddraig as well as my other comrades to listen to their advice.

Part 5

Returning home from Beelzebub-sama's place, I told Ravel about the situation, and I couldn't sit still for some reason, so I made my way towards the training room in the basement. It was already time for everyone to be asleep. But before going to bed, I talked to Ddraig by myself, and meditated for a while. —However, when I reached the basement, I noticed that the lights in the training room were still switched on. Looking inside — it was Asia who was staring at a basketball frame and practising shots.

"Asia?"

After hearing my voice, Asia stopped and turned around.

"Ah, Ise-san."

"You're still here so late…are you practising for the ball tournament?"

Basketball was not the only sport to be played on that day's tournament…but thinking back, I could always see Asia, Xenovia and Irina practising for the ball tournament during our team's training time and other free times. Sometimes it was handball, sometimes it was football, and today it was basketball — huh. Asia wiped away her sweat as she said

"…Because I'm always dragging behind, I want to help Ise-san a bit, so all I can do is practice like this."

Asia looked at the basket as she voiced her true thoughts.

"…Whether or not I've become a good buchou, I always feel uneasy…because I'm always comparing myself to Rias-oneesama."

…I see, no wonder I could occasionally see Asia act like Rias. But she also noticed that there was 'something different'.

"Kiba-san has become a very good vice-president, and as Akeno-san's successor, he performs his duties very well. …To be honest, I really think that Kiba-san would be a much better buchou than I…"

"Asia, what you think is—"

I wanted to refute it, but Asia interrupted me, and revealed a bright expression.

"I understand. This is wrong. Rias-oneesama had her own style as buchou. And I must also become a buchou with my own style."

Her expression was one of determination which showed that she had finally reached within herself to find an answer.

"Xenovia has also taken up her role of Student Council President splendidly, and she doesn't imitate the former President Sona, she has her own way of doing things to run the Student Council. Ise-san also hasn't followed Rias-oneesama's style of work, you've found your own way to perform your Devil's job. My good friends and the

person that I like already have such notions, so I too — should set that as my goal."

—Hmm. …Asia, you've finally overcome that hurdle. You thought on your own, and arrived at your own answer to overcome the obstacle and cross that barrier. I originally intended to secretly help her, but Asia had used her own strength to overcome her trouble. It was certainly quite worrying before. She was never able to concentrate on anything because her mind was always on something else. However, Asia didn't stop there, she found the answer on her own and grew. I…was moved to tears. In this year, not only did Asia grow in strength, her willpower had also grown stronger. My most precious Asia-chan whom I kept trying to protect had now embraced her own resolve to become 'buchou'….

"…You've grown."

I couldn't help but feel emotional, while Asia blushed and waved both of her hands.

"T-That's not the case! E-Even now, so that I don't drag everyone down in the ball tournament, I'm practising in secret like this."

"To act on your own and want to change yourself, only people like this can become truly strong. That's what I think."

I nodded at my own words. In other words, my Asia-chan had finally awakened the strength of her mind. It was cause for celebration! Very well, I'll also practise for the ball tournament!

"Alright, Asia. I'll practise basketball with you! Let's start with a hundred shots!"

"Yes!"

Just as the two of us were about to start our basketball practise, another person walked into the training room.

"…May I also help with training?"

It was Elmenhilde.

"Elmenhilde, you're still awake…no, at a time like this, it doesn't seem quite right to say that to a Vampire like you."

Night was truly a Vampire's time. There was no better time than this for their bodies to be so active. Elmenhilde picked up the basketball that had fallen to the floor with an unreadable expression on her face.

"…I didn't listen in on Asia-san's conversation intentionally, but I've also decided to change after hearing that."

After a pause, she finally spoke.

"…I'll say it. The reason why I want to participate in the tournament—"

So Elmenhilde finally wants to tell us huh. Previously, because of Qlippoth — Rizevim's actions, the Vampires' society was destroyed because the patriarchal Tepes faction and the matriarchal Carmilla faction had both been involved in a devastating battle. In particular, Qlippoth had sweet-talked high-class Vampires on both sides to start a deep interference internally, and ultimately betrayed them. This

resulted in all of the high-class noble Vampires that always boasted of their superior blood being transformed into Evil Dragons. Elmenhilde said

"…After that, when I returned home, what I saw was — an ending that was very unpleasant and sorrowful. …Originally a pure-blooded Vampire, my comrades who were proud of their strength as True Ancestors of Carmilla-sama…they had actually turned into Evil Dragons as well. The people of the Karnstein family, and my childhood friends had also been brutally poisoned because they had associated with Qlippoth."

What she saw in her homeland was — her uncle, cousin and even her own friends whom she once considered compatriots, changed into ugly Evil Dragons. Regardless of whether it was her uncle or her cousin, the Karnstein family…was fed up with how the Carmilla faction had handled things. The role of the aristocratic leader of the Carmilla faction had always been succeeded by a woman. Male kin could only be dominated by the female leaders. They could no longer endure it after an almost eternal amount of time. They began to appreciate the Tepes faction that respected male Vampires. Thus, they sought the assistance of Qlippoth to strengthen the rights of the male kin in the Carmilla faction. This betrayal was not only performed by Elmenhilde's uncle and cousin, but by the majority of the nobility's male kin.

—On the surface, they seemed to accept that the domination of female kin was normal, but they could not stand that domination on the inside. This sentiment that grew over long years finally burst out. This made the females of the Carmilla faction — feel extremely shocked. The only ones who believed that they got along well with their lovers, partners, siblings, and male family members were those women and a very small proportion of men. The concept that the Carmilla faction had been founded on and the values of the pure-blooded Vampires had been shaken, and cracks formed. This was presumably the great divide that occurred within the faction. Friends of the same gender also agreed with those male nobles to betray the country. And their lovers — also looked forward to being ruled over by the men. … Not all of the female Vampires were powerful. It took an incredible amount of courage for the female Vampires to stand above the male Vampires while they were weaker than them. It required a strong sense of determination—. That was why there were also so many female Vampires who couldn't bear it. No, this was a natural result. It was because not all of the female nobility were able to allow their families to flourish. …To witness the ultimate ending of her friends who had wished to be dominated by male Vampires…seeing the form of the Evil Dragons, Elmenhilde felt as though she could hear the sound of something shattering within her body. Elmenhilde said that much — and then tears began to overflow from her deep red eyes.

"…Looking at my friends who sacrificed everything for the motherland, I felt angry at myself for failing to realise the kinds of trouble that they bottled up inside and couldn't easily divulge…and at the same time, after I became aware of their true intentions, I could do nothing but deny them…. At the very end, I was unable to save them no matter what I did, and this harsh reality…overwhelmed me. So I didn't want to continue staying in the motherland, I asked to work outside, and travel to various places. …If I stayed in the motherland, I don't think my heart would have been able to survive…!"

Elmenhilde cried as she spoke. …Although she originally had such a haughty

attitude, everything she did was for the sake of her ideals and in order to protect the dignity of her country. It was because she thought that her own view of the world was correct, and there had never been any doubt in her mind of its justice. —However, all of that was crushed. At a time when she was unaware, her own kin and friends dealt with enormous stress that couldn't be released, resulting in a distortion of their minds, and eventually a corruption of the entire nation's philosophy. Rizevim would have enjoyed inciting such events to transpire…. …Elmenhilde's values collapsed, so it wasn't surprising that her personality had changed so much. After being betrayed by the people who had accompanied her for so long…there was far more inexplicable sadness than anger. Elmenhilde wiped away her tears as she said

"…I've already said this to Ravel Phoenix-san. So, I should also say this to you given that you're the leader of the team."

"…Thank you. You told me even though it was so difficult for you."

"…There's no need to thank me, since everything has already happened, this is what I must do. Mmm, I thought of participating in this tournament to overcome that…if there are so many races participating in the tournament, I feel like I might be able to gain something from it…. I must become stronger. If I can change myself, then I definitely won't repeat the same mistakes."

…I see, so this girl wants to change herself just like Asia, and wishes to become stronger. After hearing Asia's confession, she was inspired to be honest with me. But, I still had one concern, so I asked

"But why did you choose my team? Wouldn't any other team have been okay?"

Upon hearing my question, Elmenhilde's face suddenly reddened and her voice also sounded an octave higher.

"T-That is because! …How should I put this…to say it…I wonder if it could truly happen…"

Elmenhilde's response puzzled me…while beside me, Asia seemed to get angry at me as she scolded

"Ise-san, you still have much to learn!"

…What? Am I the only person who doesn't understand? —Just as I pondered over that, another person arrived.

"What's going on, I was thinking of having a late-night shower, but I never imagined that I'd see Ise, Asia, and even Elmenhilde practising until so late."

"I wasn't quite able to sleep, so I also came underground, but I was slightly concerned because this was the only place illuminated by light."

It was Xenovia and Irina who had appeared. Irina looked at me, Asia, and Elmenhilde. Upon seeing Elmenhilde's tears and reddened face, she seemed to realise something.

"Hah! C-Could it be that she was sexually assaulted…?"

Xenovia squinted as she sighed.

“As expected of the ero-Angel Irina. Even I never considered that.”

“S-Seriously! I just couldn’t help but think of that! You don’t have to look at me in such a strange light!”

Xenovia brushed it aside with “Okay okay” as she picked up the basketball on the ground.

“It can’t be helped, let’s all practise together with Asia like there’s no tomorrow!”

Irina also agreed.

“A good suggestion! The others…there’s no need to wake them, after all, it is the night before the all-important match.”

Indeed, it would be a good idea to let the people who were already asleep rest until the next morning. Asia joyfully lowered her head.

“E-Everyone, I’m so grateful! Regardless of whether it’s tomorrow, or in the ball tournament, I-I will do my best!”

Asia and Xenovia alternated taking shots with each other.

“Xenovia-san! I won’t lose to you in the ball tournament!”

“That’s my line! Let us have a splendid match between the Occult Research Club and the Student Council!”

“I’m Asia’s partner! That also makes me a member of the Occult Research Club!”

“Hmph! Very well, then I’ll go against Asia and Irina, and defeat both of you at once!”’

Elmenhilde stood by Xenovia’s side and said

“Since it’s two against one, I’ll stand on Xenovia-san’s side.”

Like this, an impromptu two on two competition began in the underground training area. I smiled as I watched them, when Ravel appeared by my side all of a sudden. Ravel quietly said

“I think we will use Elmenhilde-sama in this match.”

I enjoyed myself as I watched Elmenhilde play basketball while I replied to Ravel’s words with

“Yeah, let’s do that. She wants to change herself, and also chose to come over to my side. …Since I know the reason now, I should lend her a hand.”

That’s right, we should grow together. No matter what the situation, that’s how my comrades and I overcame so many difficulties—. Like this, we progressed into the day of the match along with our new team members ‘Nakiri Kouchin Ouryuu’ and ‘Elmenhilde Karnstein’.

Notes

1. Usually used as slang or informally to refer to an older brother.

2. Apparently paisen is slang for senpai/senior.

3. In traditional Chinese culture, it is believed to be the circulating life force or energy that is thought to be inherent in all things.

Upsetting sorcerer.I

—Dulio Gesualdo is the best Angel.

In the human realm — a certain European country. Upon a small hill in the corner of a small city, there was a small tombstone. The person standing in front of that tombstone was — the man ranked seventh in the Rating Games, the supervisor of the [Trump Card of Heaven] team, Rudiger Rosenkreutz. A bunch of flowers were laid upon the grave — as well as a toy robot. …Resting beneath the grave was his beloved son. After Rudiger reincarnated as a Devil, he became active in the Rating Games, and after a long time, he finally had his first child. Although there were rumours that it was much easier for reincarnated Devils to have children than pure-blooded Devils, it had still taken many long years for his first child to be born. The child that he had been looking forward to…arrived into this world with a disease. …If it was a disease that had a name, even that would have been better. But regardless of whether it was human medical technology, or Devils' technology, or magical techniques, none of them could find a treatment. Though, what his own child carried was — a Sacred Gear.

While enduring the erosion of the Sacred Gear, he lived but gradually weakened; because of the mysterious power of the Sacred Gear, his body was gradually eroded. As long as someone carried a trace of human blood, then it was possible to have children who were born with a Sacred Gear.

But I never could have imagined that my own child would be born with a Sacred Gear, and on top of that, to have no immunity to it…. Regardless of whether the Sacred Gear was forcefully removed or sealed, the risk of death still lingered, and both the researchers and doctors of the Underworld had said that my child would not live for long. Since birth, my child's time was limited—. But even so, it was still my hard-won and adorable child.

Rudiger and his wife did their best to meet the requests of their child. They bought him whichever toy he wanted, and when the condition of his body was better, they took him wherever he wanted to go. And when his child's body suddenly failed, he even withdrew from important matches. That was the extent of Rudiger's love for his child—. …However, the time limit for his life was in danger, and the final verdict had also been handed down by the doctor. …Even if he left behind a legacy in the Rating Games, became feared by even more high-class Devils, and inspired even more human reincarnated Devils, he was still unable to save his own child. Rudiger watched on as his child's body grew increasingly frail, he felt pain at his own powerlessness, and cursed himself. However, it was on a certain day. When Rudiger asked his own child what he wanted.

My child lay on the hospital bed and looked up into the sky outside the window and spoke with a little consideration

—I want to see an Angel. I heard that there is an amazing Angel in Heaven called Joker.

Rudiger's child had a rather unique interest. Instead of focusing on the popular

‘Oppai Dragon’ or Diehauser Belial, he wanted to see a white-winged Angel. If this was the past, then it would have been a distant dream, but it was possible in the present. But the person that he wanted to see was one of the strongest in Heaven, the Joker Dulio Gesualdo. He had constantly been involved in the fight against terrorism, so his schedule was very tight. And upon hearing about some Church institutions, he learned that there were also other children who suffered because of their Sacred Gears, and he was fighting for them. …But on this side, he was a Devil. He was a far lower priority. To him, the children in the Church institutions would always be his number one consideration. …However, he knew that the end of his child’s life was approaching. As if seizing a final lifeline, Rudiger wrote a letter, and sent it to Heaven through the Underworld’s government. …Even if he was a famous person in the Rating Games, he still had no relation to Heaven. The possibility of his letter arriving there, and the possibility of it being read, was probably zero. Rudiger didn’t have high hopes, but believed that it was the least he could do. —However, a few days after the letter was sent out.

“Oh, it’s our first meeting. I heard that there was a child who wanted to see me, so I immediately flew over.”

He came. He actually came to the Underworld…! —He stood in front of my child. My son looked at the Joker with an expression of longing. My child’s originally spiritless face was overflowing with light because of his appearance. After that, Dulio used his free time to visit my child. Even though he clearly had to take care of other children, and he obviously had a lot of work to take care of. He dealt with all of it so that he could make spare time to smile in front of my child. Time and time again—.

It was a miracle that Rudiger’s child was able to live a little longer than the doctors had anticipated. …However, he still could not escape from the fate of death. Even so, his child had departed from the world with a satisfied expression. At the very end, he was truly happy to be able to converse with Dulio. When he thought of going to thank the Joker, Rudiger saw it. —It was a pained and regretful look that Dulio Gesualdo showed when he shed tears for his child.

“…Did you want to live for a bit longer? There should have been many more places that you wanted to visit. There should have been many more delicious things that you wanted to eat…. But because of the suffering from the Sacred Gear bestowed unto you by God-sama, you departed without growing up…it is simply too unreasonable…”

When he saw the expression that Dulio made for the death of his child — Rudiger was moved to tears.

—Dulio Gesualdo is the best Angel.

The Angel that my child adored is the best Joker.

Afterwards, Dulio expressed his intent to participate in the Rating Game World Tournament. His wish after attaining victory was to modify the Sacred Gear system. By using all of the mystical power of the gathered factions, he wanted to re-adjust the Sacred Gear system so that no one would ever suffer because of their Sacred Gear again. Interfering with the Sacred Gear system was a taboo idea that even Archangel Michael hesitated on. Even so, if he could attain the winning prize of the tournament, and achieve this wish, then it should be possible; the thoughts of Dulio and the

reincarnated Angels were the same. —They hoped that there would be no further children who would have to suffer because of their Sacred Gears. After hearing of the aspirations of the reincarnated Angels, Rudiger Rosenkreutz made a decision. He was determined! He volunteered to become the supervisor of the Joker team. … Rudiger made a vow for victory as he stood in front of his child's grave. The small hill that this tombstone was erected on faced the Vatican. Even if he was the child of a Devil, it was the wish of his parents to allow him to rest somewhere a bit closer to Dulio.

"Ah, you're already here, supervisor."

He heard a familiar voice. He turned around to see Dulio. He…had arrived here punctually. When asked, he revealed that there were actually other children buried here, which was why he occasionally came to visit. Dulio placed flowers and a small toy onto Rudiger's child's grave and then said

"I think Ise-kun will definitely use an ero technique."

"In the meantime, we have a countermeasure. I think it's almost certain. Isn't that the kind of man he is?"

"Of course, that's precisely the kind of person he is."

Dulio laughed. He seemed to be looking forward to the battle. Rudiger said

"Oppai Dragon-kun is strong. In the span of a year, there have been many so many historical events that it's almost unreal. And he has often appeared at the centre of these events. His incredible strength and merits have certainly made him no less than a hero. Moreover, supporting him from behind is Ravel Phoenix, who is also very talented. In thirty years…no, in just twenty years, he'll become a master of tactics and strategy in the Rating Games of the Underworld."

The next opponent was a powerful one. There was no doubt that he would be the strongest that they had faced so far.

"However, the most terrifying thing is the Sekiryuutei's black armour. That cannon blast is very similar to the miracles that god-class beings can trigger. No matter which team it is, anyone would be defeated if they took a direct hit from that. It is a simple and blunt trump card. Its mere existence incites dread in the opposing team. It's a major factor that any opposing team has to take into account when considering their performance in the match."

Regardless of whether it was the offensive power of that armour, or the abilities of the opposing team members, those were still unknown factors. Although an extensive investigation had been performed, and they had also rushed over to his house to get a grasp on his living habits, he was still a formidable enemy. —Someone capable of performing a miracle could always break through expectations and calculations easily. Rudiger wasn't an existence as loved by fate as the Joker or the Sekiryuutei. All he could do was continually prepare, and aim for gaps to strike and defeat the opponent.

…But, in order to fulfil my wish, I have to surpass them, no matter who the opponent is.

Rudiger asked Dulio

“But even so, the ones to win — will be us. Am I right, Trump Card of Heaven — Dulio Gesualdo?”

“Of course.”

Dulio smiled with a carefree look, the same as when he had smiled towards my child at that time.

Rudiger solemnly made an oath to the photo of his beloved child that he kept in his pocket.

…Ah, I understand. You also want to see this Angel’s in action, right?

—Dulio Gesualdo is the best Angel.

I will definitely allow this man to win.

That was the present goal of Rudiger Rosenkreutz—.

Team member

“Trump Card of Heaven”
Registered team members

King	———	Dulio	(Joker)
Queen	———	Diethelm Waldseemüller	(Raphael’s Ace: ♣)
Rook	———	Nero Raimondi	(Uriel’s Ace: ♦)
Rook	———	Ryuu Heikan	(Raziel’s IO: ♦)
Knight	———	Jessica Lagerkvist	(Sandalphon’s Queen: ♣)
Knight	———	Shinra Kiyotora	(Metatron’s Jack: ♠)
Bishop	———	Mirana Shatarova	(Gabriel’s Ace: ♥)
Bishop	———	Griselda Quarta	(Gabriel’s Queen: ♥)
Pawn × 8	———	Eight members will be selected from the currently active Brave Saints of 2 ~ 9	

Replacements for Dulio, the Aces of three of the Four Great Seraphim and other team members seldom happen. Although the Brave Saints belonging to Metatron and Sandalphon are very strong, they currently have other missions, so they will only be selected to participate in matches during the finals. The status and information on the other Joker who is also known as the Extra Joker are unknown..

Life.4
VS [Brave Saints] Begins!

Part I

And then, it was the day of the match—.

Our [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team had already arrived at the venue half a day before the beginning of the match. We were able to arrive early precisely because today was a school break day. The venue for this match was the [Ajuka Stadium] in the Astaroth territory. It was a stadium which had been built to commemorate Ajuka Beelzebub-sama, so it was very modern, and it even used some unknown technology. The corridors were equipped with automatic cleaning robots, and all kinds of facilities were present. The waiting room was also very spacious; there were obviously no problems with human-like beings entering, and there weren't any issues with giants entering the room in their original bodies either. That was why Bova had reverted back to his original dragon form. Incidentally, our new members Nakiri and Elmenhilde were both wearing the uniform of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team. They were specially prepared for this day. But it was actually so spacious that I didn't know what to do…. The vastness of the space made it difficult to calm myself down.

"Do you best, Ise!"

Kunou ran over to my side. …Ophis and Lilith who were normally with her had stayed behind at home today. Regardless, it wouldn't be good to let them come out. The person who came after Kunou was—.

"Yo, Ise. Asia-chan and everyone else too."

Dad! Although I did give them tickets, I didn't think that they would actually come!

"Dad! Did you come over to watch?"

"Yeah, I came to see the glorious match that my son and daughters will be participating in. Though it still feels strange when I come to the world of the Devils."

Dad was transported here via the magic circle that was set up in the basement of the Hyoudou residence, it was something that I had already gotten used to. Dad spoke to me with slight consideration

"In fact, I'm quite hesitant to see you before the match because I'm afraid that it'll bring you strange emotions or tension that may affect your ability to participate in the game."

"…What about mum? So she didn't end up coming in the end huh."

I had given them a pair ticket, but I couldn't see mum around. Dad sighed.

"Well, you don't have to feel so worried about mum, Ise. You're her only beloved son, so even if it's just a game, she still won't budge. Mum is simply too worried that she won't be able to bear it, so it naturally doesn't work out. Asia-chan is also like an important daughter to us, and she's also going to participate in this competition. I don't think your mother's heart is prepared for this, especially if she had to watch it directly."

"…Hmm, she did ask me quite a few times about the safety of the games at home.

Although mum didn't object…I can understand from her reaction that she doesn't feel happy about it."

Rias had also told me

—*Mum is just an ordinary woman.*

…She didn't have the same mentality as people like us who had constantly trained in a supernatural world. She was just like an ordinary 'mother' who could be seen everywhere…. So, that was why she didn't want to see her own children get hurt. … Even so, I still hoped that my parents would be able to see me fighting in the game…. Dad comforted my disappointment.

"Mum will be watching the broadcast closely. So before long, she'll make her way over here. Well, I'll cheer for you on behalf of mum as well today, so make sure you show me your cool side!"

"Of course, leave it to me! Although our opponents are strong, I'll definitely let dad see me, Asia, and everyone act cool! Right, Asia!?"

I asked Asia, and Asia also raised her hand enthusiastically.

"That's right! I'll definitely let dad see a good show!"

Time flew by as we exchanged conversations like this as family members — and then it was finally time for the players to enter. We finished our preparations — Asia, Xenovia, Irina, Ravel, Rossweisse-san, Bina-shi, Bova and I, as well as our new members Nakiri and Elmenhilde. Elemnhilde seemed a little nervous.

"Although it's your first match, I'm looking forward to your participation, and I'll make sure to support you."

As soon as she heard me say that, she nodded and mumbled with a slightly shaky voice

"Y-Yeah."

…I didn't expect that this girl would feel so pressured because of the enthusiasm in the arena and the atmosphere of the tournament. Ravel said

"Come, it's time. Let's go."

We left the waiting room and made our way into the arena. The lively cheers from the audience members in the stadium had already made its way to us. It had the indescribable effect of making us feel more tension. We had already experienced this kind of atmosphere quite a few times now…it no longer made us flinch, and it simply made us feel calm and optimistic about our own emotions. As we all walked through the corridor on our way to the ring, we encountered the [Trump Card of Heaven] team. We maintained a set distance from each other as we walked together through the corridor that led to the arena. At the entrance, we waited for the announcer to call our names, and at this time, Dulio said to me

"Ise-kun, there sure are a lot of [Oppai Dragon] fans in the stadium."

Dulio cast his eyes across the stadium from the entrance. …The audience stands were filled with my merchandise and fans who supported me with banners. It

seemed as though the enthusiasm of my fans would only intensify the more we won in the tournament. Dulio pointed to a corner of the audience stands. There was a flag showing support for the [Trump Card of Heaven] team there. There was also a group of children sitting in a row as they held up a horizontal banner.

“But, our fans have also come. They’re in a corner of the stadium, even though their numbers are somewhat few.”

Indeed, when compared to my fans, they were just like a droplet in an ocean…but Dulio was still highly satisfied.

“But, that is enough. …My fellow Angels have said to me that the voices of those children might be overshadowed by the cheers of Issei-kun’s fans — but I firmly believe that is impossible. If it was you, then what would you think, Ise-kun?”

“—Of course, even if there are only a few people, or even just one person, their support will reach my ears!”

I replied without any hesitation. Dulio revealed a pleased smile and then asked

“…Ise-kun, can I ask you something before the match?”

“Sure, what is it?”

Dulio looked at Asia who was a slight distance away from us and said

“If Asia-chan could live life as an ordinary sister, would she be happier than she is now? —Have you ever thought of that?”

“Of course I have. I’ve thought about it many times. I’ve also hated God of the Bible, Heaven and the Church before.”

I kept thinking about it over the past year. But, time cannot be rewound. Asia was working hard in her current life, while my comrades and I supported her so that she wouldn’t feel inconvenienced. Dulio continued to ask me

“On the other hand, Asia-chan’s present life — have you ever thought that her current life as a Devil is more difficult than it was when she was a human?”

“—I often think that it should be better, so I’m doing all that I can to keep Asia happy.”

This is all because I value Asia a lot. I want to protect her! Dulio looked towards the audience stands as he said to me

“Because of the imperfection of Sacred Gears, the lives of believers have been hurt —. But, precisely because this imperfection exists, that has made her current life possible…as an ordinary girl living in Japan and enjoying a school life. Is this the correct answer for Asia-chan due to the imperfection of the Sacred Gear system? It’s difficult to say whether Asia-chan’s current feelings are a correct answer to the inadequacies of the system. This also goes for Yuuto, Tosca-chan, Gya-kun, Valerie-san and the Sitri peerage. They experienced misfortune because of its incompleteness, but that passage of misfortune has led to their present lives…. But there are many children who are unable to reach beyond that distant sky, they are unable to obtain a new life for themselves.”

Somehow, I saw Dulio looking at his reincarnated Angel team, and I was able to imagine what kind of prize they were aiming for. This was something that Dulio had always cared about.

“Dulio, I—”

I wanted to give a response to what Dulio had just said, but he reached out with his hand and shook his head. …In the end, I couldn’t say what I had wanted to say.

“…Ise-kun, it’s fine as long as you become Asia-chan’s best answer. Because this is the answer that I, no, that we are looking for.”

Dulio extended his fist out to me.

“I will defeat you, Ise-kun. No, Sekiryuutei. We will defeat you.”

…I see, so that’s what Dulio’s goal is. He hoped that we wouldn’t hold back because of our concerns, he wanted to convey that so that everyone could do their best for their own aspirations. I responded to Dulio by thrusting my fist out to bump his.

“No, I’ll be the one to win. After all, no matter what dreams I have, and no matter what dreams you have, its courtesy for us to throw everything we have against each other on the battlefield, Dulio. …This is something that my comrades-in-arms have taught me.”

“It looks like it’ll be a wonderful match.”

We smiled at each other. From here on, we would be fighting against each other in the stadium, but this is one thing that you have to remember, Dulio. —If you come to seek help, I’m always willing to lend a helping hand, you know? Because we’re both friends and comrades. After I confirmed this in my mind, our battle against the [Trump Card of Heaven] team finally began.

Part 2

<<Now, please welcome the players in!>>

Following the announcer's instructions, we entered the ring one by one.

"Oppai Dragon—!"

"Zoom zoom iyan—!"

The shouts of my fans could be heard from among the audience. Ah, I'm so grateful to you all. Because of your cheers, I feel even more motivated. Our two teams lined up in two rows in the centre of the ring. …The opposing team's supervisor Rudiger-san wasn't here. It was because supervisors were not actually allowed to enter the playing field. That was why he would have told the players about the battle plan and strategy before the start of the match, and he was currently waiting for them somewhere else. It was the announcer's job to give an introduction and explanation before the match.

<<Commentating for us today is — one of the organisers of this tournament and also one of the great Maous, Ajuka Beelzebub-sama. We welcome your presence. Beelzebub-sama, thank you for your time today.>>

Ah, seriously!? Beelzebub-sama is actually sitting in the commentary box! I understand though, his hometown is in the Astaroth territory, and the stadium is also named after him, so the possibility of an invitation was high!

<<Yes, I am also looking forward to today's match.>>

Beelzebub-sama succinctly replied. Even though he was currently the only Maou-sama, and he had so much work to do, he still accepted the invitation to come over. The announcer continued to introduce the next guest.

<<In fact, we have also invited another guest this time! One of Five Great Dragon Kings who is also a familiar of Asia Argento-senshu of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team, Gigantis Dragon-kun!>>

—What! The Pantsu Dragon King!? Just as the announcer said, an enormous golden dragon was sitting in the commentary box.

<<…I will only cheer for Asia-tan.>>

And that was actually how he replied…. I don't know how to describe this situation. Why are you in such a place right after you just recovered!? Beelzebub-sama and the Pantsu Dragon King, what kind of combination is this!? The announcer nodded at Fafnir's comment.

<<I see! So it can be interpreted that you are also looking forward to it! Ah, please do not take out any pantsu! That is no good! P-Please don't be like this, it isn't very good to suddenly take out underwear during the World Tournament, Fafnir-san!>>

That idiot Fafnir, he tried to take Asia's pantsu out at such a time! Aaaaaah, my Asia-chan is so embarrassed that she's covering her face and shivering! How should I put

this, is this a tactic to make one of my players feel nervous before the match!? The announcer sighed, and then continued with the explanation.

<<…B-By the way, Fafnir-san is Asia Argento-senshu's familiar, so when necessary, he will respond to a summoning and be transported away from the commentary booth to appear on the field. Please understand this in advance, audience members!>>

—Don't you have to explain that to us as well!? Why is that Pantsu Dragon King over there!? B-But, if Asia is in danger, then he'll rush over…. By the way, the Rating Game World Tournament had limitations on the usage of familiars in the same way that the Rating Games did. As explained before, if there were no limitations on the usage of familiars, then it would become a competition in which both sides simply relied on their familiars. That was why there was a need to consider their usage.

<<Well, while the members of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team and the [Trump Card of Heaven] team complete their warm-up preparations, we'll begin to decide on the game event!>>

The large screen in the stadium would show what the event of this match would be. Various types of event titles continuously spun around like a roulette wheel. —And then, it was finally decided. What appeared on the screen were — the Devil characters for [Rampage Ball].

<<I-It has been decided—! The competition event for the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team and the [Trump Card of Heaven] team will be [Rampage Ball]!>>

As the announcer shouted, the entire venue began to grow even more excited. … This event would be tough. It would make the match even more unpredictable this time. Beside me, Ravel's expression also seemed grim.

"…Of all things, it had to be this one…!"

Xenovia seemed to recall something about it and she asked Ravel

"This event, if I remember correctly, it's something like a ball game, right?"

"Yes, that's right, Xenovia-sama. This is a game in which we compete for a ball to score points."

The announcer began to explain the rules of the event.

<<The rules are very simple! This competition is one in which both teams find the goals that appear all over the game field, and then throw the ball in!>>

Chessboard-like signs could be seen across the spacious field, similar to how it was in [Object Break]. For example, if the goal appeared in the box C4, both teams would have to compete for the ball while they made their way towards that location to aim for the goal. The announcer continued

<<The points obtained are based on the piece value of the scorer. For example, if a [Knight] successfully scores, then [3] points will be awarded to that team! If it's a [Rook], then they receive [5] points! Choosing the person who scores will be a key to the game!>>

The highest points possible are from the [King] at ten points, and the [Queen] at nine points, so if we were to try scoring, it would be best done by me or Bina-shi, as this would net us the most points. …But, things wouldn't be as simple as that. After all, our opponents were also aware of this, so while they obstructed us, they would also be looking for opportunities to allow Dulio to score. The announcer then said

<<After the points from a successful scoring are confirmed, the goal will disappear. It will then appear at another random point on the field, so the players of both teams will once again compete for the ball and then aim to throw it into the goal!>>

Irina asked Ravel

"Is it possible to find out where the goal appears very quickly?"

"Yes, using a special device for the game, we can immediately know where the goal has appeared. We'll have to compete for the ball while we race towards the goal area. The problem is…stamina management."

Indeed, just as Ravel said, this was a game type that placed an emphasis on preserving energy. After all, within the time limit, we would have to constantly race towards the goal, and after scoring, we would have to race towards the next goal, and so on. To put it simply, it was a competition that involved constant running back and forth. It caused me to recall that Ravel and Rias had both told me in the past that patience was the most important factor in these kinds of games.

<<In this match, during the course of battle, even if players from one side are defeated, they will be able to return to the match after a fixed period of time! In other words, players will not be forced to retire even when they receive fatal damage!>>

In this match, injuries would not result in retirement. Even if someone was defeated, they could soon return to the field. Stamina — until one's endurance was worn down, players could continue to return to the game indefinitely. In other words, even if an opponent was defeated, that was not an absolute condition for victory. That was because no points were gained from defeating an opponent. Xenovia sighed

"…Since we can't rely on damage for retirement, we'll have to rely on stamina as the deciding factor huh."

Ravel nodded.

"In normal games, an injury will allow for retirement, or even incapacitation. But in this ball game, even if an opponent has been defeated, they can still return after a while. As long as their stamina is not exhausted for the game's duration, then there is really no such thing as retirement."

Nakiri gave a wry smile.

"…Fighting for the ball while running around the field within the time limit huh. So this is what I've got even though it's my first battle."

Bina-shi said

"This is why the most important thing is stamina management. Compared to the categories that simply involve defeating the opponent, this is a more difficult category. Even for players who have incredible strength, if they don't possess good

stamina and plan their energy usage, opponents can come from behind to win if they become exhausted; this has often happened in the professional Rating Games.”

…If a finishing technique was used at every opportunity in an attempt to decide the victor, and even if it was a direct hit, it would be very difficult for that to become the final decisive blow. Because this was a competition that was judged based on the scoring of a ball game—. After explaining the rules of the game, the announcer said

<<Now then, both teams, please teleport onto the battlefield! We are sincerely looking forward to this battle between the Devil and Angel representatives of [DxD]!>>

The venue rumbled as my team and Dulio’s team were enveloped by the light of transportation—.

The place that we were transported to was — an empty space that had absolutely nothing in it. …It was quite similar to the underground space that we used for training. We stood some distance away from each other as we began our preparations. I had already equipped my crimson armour. For confirmation, Ravel said

“This time, some of our members have changed their piece values. Bova-san who was originally a [Pawn] has now filled in the vacant [Rook] position, and our newly added members Nakiri-san and Elmenhilde-sama have taken up the [Pawn] positions.”

One of the [Rook] positions was originally vacant, so that was now allocated to Bova, while [5] of the eight [Pawn] pieces were allocated to Nakiri, and [2] were allocated to Elmenhilde. We had discussed it for quite a while and as a result of those discussions and in terms of the current situation, this was the best arrangement to make full use of the potential of all of our members. At this time, the referee’s voice echoed throughout the field. Although we couldn’t see them, the referee was looking at us from somewhere.

<<Before the match begins, we will provide both teams with two devices which are capable of projecting a full view of the field.>>

After saying that, a light shone brightly near us, and the operators sent us two identical watch-like devices. Ravel and I wore it on our wrists. After some fiddling with — a full projection of the field was displayed. The entire field had been divided into eight by eight regions. The goal would appear at random in any of these areas. If they appeared at any of the far ends…then we would have to expend a vast amount of energy to reach it. This was a rather terrifying and unpredictable game type. In a space that had absolutely nothing, anything could happen within this vastness. On the contrary, it was impossible to hide anything because there were no obstacles. There were advantages and disadvantages to this. The referee continued

<<Very well, the match between the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team and [Trump Card of Heaven] team will now begin! The time limit is two hours! There will be water replenishment stations at various points as hydration is also an important part of this! Now, start!>>

A buzzer rang out across the field to mark the beginning. Ravel and I used the projection device to confirm — the first goal had appeared in E4! Right in the centre

of the field. Our current location was D1. Dulio's team was currently in E8. They were exactly opposite it. Our first destination was right in the centre, so it was a goal that would be taken by the first to race there!

"Everyone, the first one is in E4! Let's go!"

[Yeah!]

As soon as I gave the order, all members rushed over towards E4! The ball would also appear next to the goal, so the first team to arrive had the advantage. Whether it was flying through the air or running at high-speed across the ground, everyone used their own method of movement to close in on the goal area. As for Asia who was not as good in terms of high-speed ground movement, she had summoned the fastest Evil Dragon of the four Evil Dragon brothers, and she rode on its back. Elmenhilde had transformed into a bat and she flew through the air. Along the way, Rossweisse-san said

"I'll chant magic to improve everyone's physical abilities!"

—She then cast the magic on us, causing our flying and running speeds to increase further. Hence, it was only a minute or so whilst flying until I saw a glittering gold hoop up ahead. That's the goal! We'll be able to score as long as we can get the ball into that ring! And the ball that we were after — was not far away from the goal. The golden ball floated in mid-air. So that's the ball! It's roughly the size of a basketball!

"Anyone will do! Get the ball and then throw it in!"

[Understood!]

Everyone responded to me enthusiastically! Needless to say, I increased my speed to get closer to the ball as soon as I saw it. Just as we were about to reach it—. On the field which originally couldn't have changes in weather conditions, rain clouds appeared! I immediately understood! It was Dulio's Sacred Gear! Weather manipulation! He used his Sacred Gear to make these rain clouds! He planned to control the weather to hinder us! As expected, the rain clouds turned into thunderclouds, causing heavy rain to fall down onto the field accompanied by lightning strikes! The ice-cold drops of water rained down heavily on our bodies, instantly increasing the effort we had to make, and if rain continued to fall on us, our stamina would quickly be exhausted! Even dodging the lightning strikes would drain us of energy! However, we would also take damage if we were hit by it! My comrades dodged the bolts of lightning while moving underneath the falling rain, doing their best to rush towards the ball — but appearing in that place were Angels encased in bubbles! —Damn it! It's Dulio's ability! He had created a bubble for each team member so that they would be unaffected by the weather's influence! He ensured that everyone on his team could invalidate the effects of his own ability! The first person to touch the ball was — Xenovia! As expected of my [Knight]! She held Durandal with one hand, and held the ball in her other hand. At that time, an Angel charged across towards her!

"Captainnnnnnn Angel! I'm coming, Xenovia!"

It was Uriel's Ace who was dressed up like an American superhero — Nero!

"Nero huh, I won't hand over the ball!"

“Nonsense, I will take it!”

Xenovia and Nero engaged in a fierce battle for the ball. After Nero snatched the ball away from Xenovia’s arms, Xenovia snatched it back! Xenovia swung Durandal and Nero dodged. Nero unleashed a fierce kick as Xenovia turned about and dodged. This offensive and defensive battle for the ball was heating up more than I had expected. The other Angels followed by closely and tried to pin us down. The person marking me was — Dulio. Whilst Dulio’s body was inside a bubble that rendered the weather ineffective, he laughed at me.

“It’s begun, Ise-kun.”

“Yeah, I won’t lose to you.”

Offense wasn’t absolute in this game, the most important thing was who held the ball.

“Xenovia, pass!”

Following my instructions, Xenovia — threw the ball to Bova who was closest! After Bova caught it, Nero instantly changed targets and rushed towards Bova!

“Kuh!”

Bova reflexively used his giant claws to swipe at Nero…. But Ravel shouted

“—! Bova-san, you can’t just attack Nero-san like that.”

Just as Ravel finished, Nero’s body emitted a green-white light after being pushed away by Bova! The aura enveloping his body also strengthened a bit.

“…Not a bad attack, dragon! But, thank you for your that!”

Nero seemed grateful for Bova’s attack. The reason for that was Nero’s Sacred Gear.

“…Nero’s Sacred Gear is [Sturdy Saint]***III***. The more he’s attacked, the greater his defence will rise. So long as the wielder isn’t defeated, the effect will continue to work. In other words—”

The more Nero was attacked, the sturdier his defences became! Although it was a rather simple ability, the threat of that was beyond measure if it was used correctly against someone with higher physical abilities!

“This isn’t all I have! His Eminence Strada gave me—”

A holy aura gathered at Nero’s fist, and then he instantly thrust it towards Bova!

“Holy Fist!”

Bova took a direct hit from the aura of the holy fist, and the ball was loosened from the grip of his claws. After throwing a punch at Bova, Nero laughed loudly

“Hahaha! This [Captain Angel] is the owner of a steel body and a holy fist that has become the most powerful weapon!”

While Nero laughed, Nakiri quickly recovered the ball from the side, and then rushed

towards the goal—.

“—Go!”

It went in! Numbers appeared in the air above the field, and what was originally [0 – 0] had become [5 – 0]! —We had scored the first goal of the game!

<<Goooooooaaaaaal! The first to score is the new member of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team, Nakiri-senshu! Nakiri-senshu has a piece value of five, so he has scored five points!>>

The ball that had been used to score would be returned to the team that scored; so after Nakiri recovered the ball, the buzzer to indicate a resumption of play rang out and a battle for the ball began again. The next goal that appeared was displayed by the projection device, so we had to rush over to that area whilst we did everything we could to guard the ball. Like this, a hell-like endurance battle began—.

After we scored the first goal, both sides scrambled for the ball, passed the ball, scored goals and we continued to repeat this many times. The score was currently at [88 – 85], so we had a small lead…. Everyone’s breathing had become quite laboured. Even though less than half the time limit had gone by, running around across the vast field as we battled for the ball was certainly draining on our stamina. Dulio would also cause changes in the weather occasionally to exacerbate our side’s physical exertion. Even when it came to hydration, Dulio could allow his team members to drink rainwater, so there was no need for them to go to specific areas for replenishment. Dulio’s ability sure is convenient! In front of the new goal, Irina and Shinra Kiyotora-san competed for the ball. Irina wielded her holy sword while Kiyotora-san wielded a katana, both of them were sweating as they clashed with their swords to try and snatch the ball off each other. We had arrived into position so that we could receive the ball at any time while we continued to shorten the distance between ourselves…. However, the Angels’ movements seemed strange. Diethelm-san, Mirana-san, Nero and Dulio were in a certain formation…. Ravel noticed, and she alerted us of it. At that moment, Irina managed to grab hold of the ball and fly towards the goal—. Diethelm-san, Mirana-san, Nero and Dulio all cried out at the same time!

“”””Five Card!”””””

In an instant, a blinding flash of light was emitted from Diethelm-san, Mirana-san, Nero, Dulio and Irina! This was the special technique that reincarnated Angels could use! The announced yelled

<<Unbelievable! The Angel team’s bodies are emitting light! Could this be the rumoured combination attack of the reincarnated Angels!? Also! Although she’s clearly on the opposing side, the Angel team and — the Sekiryuutei team’s Shidou Irina-senshu is also resonating!?>>

Indeed, it was the opposing team that initiated the attack — but they had somehow included Irina in it as well. Irina was completely surprised by this. But it seemed as though Dulio knew that this would happen, so he used this characteristic of reincarnated Angels to increase his own physical abilities. He snatched the ball away from Irina with incredible speed, and then used that momentum to throw it into the goal!

<<And it's a gooooaaaal!!!!!! They've made use of the card combination effect of the reincarnated Angels to score a goal! An impressive result!>>

The announcer called out. …We were also astonished. Irina…she was actually used by the other team because of her characteristic! Their odd formation was all so that they could successfully use this ability! Irina seemed quite shocked about it herself. She had actually assisted the other team. …[Five Card] was a combination that used a set of four identical cards values, with the fifth card being a Joker. It was a powerful combo. …It was still so hard to imagine that they were able to score like that so easily…. We were all surprised. At that time, the announcer asked Beelzebub-sama beside him

<<But, Beelzebub-sama. Not only did they use the Angel team's players, they also used the Sekiryuutei team's Shidou Irina-senshu's card value to activate that effect, is that right…?>>

<<Hmm. I would like to say that it's a coincidence that they were able to achieve the conditions required to activate that card combination by combining the members of both teams. Even if they belong to different teams, they are still reincarnated Angels.>>

And then Dulio revealed a proud smile.

"Well, even if we're on different teams, as long as thoughts involving a desire such as 'I want to attack' or 'I want to protect' can resonate, that will satisfy the conditions to activate the card combination."

…So something like that was possible! On that topic, was that something they were aware of? Irina didn't seem to be aware of it…. What's was the difference? Who told them about that characteristic? I suddenly realised. —It was Rudiger Rosenkreutz. …Was this also one of his tactics…? He even knew the conditions for activation? … Damn it, we didn't foresee this! The announcer asked Beelzebub-sama again

<<Would this count as misconduct?>>

<<No, the players of both teams were purely focused on offense and defence. After all, no matter which side they're on, everyone is fighting on the field for their own team. This is no malicious intent in this game. If there was, what just happened would have been impossible. …That happened precisely because neither side wanted to back down.>>

That was Beelzebub-sama's judgement.

"…Using the characteristics of the card combinations, we did predict that something like this would happen, but I never imagined that the reincarnated Angels' ability would be activated in such a manner…"

Ravel also seemed somewhat disappointed.

"…In that case, Irina's movements will be restricted…!"

My words caused doubt to surface on Ravel's face.

"Yes, she may become a seed that will be exploited by the reincarnated Angels' ability. …It's because the effect of this is tremendous. Irina-sama's mentality has also

been impacted by this.”

I looked at Irina. She seemed extremely affected by what had happened. Even her face had turned pale. …Irina was completely shaken. I moved closer to Irina and hugged her shoulders to encourage her.

“Ise-kun, I’m sorry. I-I…”

“Don’t worry about it…it goes without saying that the match is not over yet. Don’t be discouraged. Don’t be afraid, everyone is still with you! Of course, I’m also on your side!”

I smiled at Irina, allowing her to calm down. It wasn’t Irina’s fault. If we could help Irina more, then it may be preventable. …Moreover, it’ll be fine so long as all of us can overcome this together.

“Let’s win, Irina.”

“Yes!”

Irina response seemed to be filled with energy again. I also felt a surge of passion within myself. …My breathing was only just starting to grow heavier. The score was [88 – 95], and we had finally been overtaken. The score had been reversed, but there was still half the time left in this game—.

Notes

1. Kanji was Saint’s Trial.

Upsetting sorcerer.2

The match between Ise-kun's team and the [Brave Saints] team had begun, and I — Kiba Yuuto and my comrades (the Gremory team) as well as Rias-neesan had come to a certain place. This was the spectator room for related personnel. Rias-neesan found the person that she was looking for. The other person also noticed Rias-neesan, and they smiled at her.

"What an unexpected guest."

Rias-neesan approached that person — and stood next to that man.

"Good day, Rudiger Rosenkreutz-sama. May we sit with you?"

The man — Rudiger-shi waved his hand and said 'please sit' as he gestured towards the seats beside him. The members of our team also sat near those two. Shown on the display was Ise-kun's team and the reincarnated Angel team that Rudiger-shi was supervising, both sides were engaged in a fierce battle with each other. In terms of the score — Rudiger-shi's team was slightly ahead. Rias-neesan watched the match as she asked

"Rudiger-sama, may I ask something?"

"It depends on what you're asking."

"…Regarding what happened to Irina earlier, was that something you had been aiming for in advance?"

Rias-neesan was originally watching in a separate room, but after seeing Irina-san become involved in the formation effect of the reincarnated Angels, she said

"…I must find out for myself."

And then we came over here. Rias-neesan must have thought that this was one of Rudiger-shi's instructions, so she wanted to ask about the intention behind that move, or perhaps its true meaning. Rudiger-shi laughed eloquently.

"Fufufu, as long as you know about the characteristics of reincarnated Angels, this is something that is certain to be included in the strategy from the beginning. However, I wasn't aiming for that from the start. It's just that various conditions were assembled in that situation, so right in that crucial moment before scoring a goal, they should make Shidou Irina waver — that's what I suggested to them."

"…I see, if you had intended on doing exactly that from the very beginning, it might not have been possible due to distractions. So that's why you simply posed it to them as a possibility…. Is it just bad luck for Ise and the others then? No, since they're on the same field battling with pure emotions against the Angels, it can't be…"

Rudiger-shi revealed a thin smile.

"Well, it's difficult for that to succeed a second time. —Even so, once is enough. So long as that seed of anxiety has been planted into their minds. Mental stress can deeply penetrate into the performance of the body. Carrying that anxiety until the end

of the match, I'm sure it'll be difficult."

Just as Rudiger-shi had said, Irina-san's actions as displayed on the screen seemed rather unnatural, and she eventually showed an opening to allow the ball to be taken away from her. If she acted freely, it was possible for that effect to be used again, and so this casted doubt over whether she would be able to continue playing on the field whilst carrying that unease…. In order to help Irina-san, Xenovia who was also a [Knight] seemed to be taking on Irina-san's share of activity as well by stepping up her actions against Rudiger-shi's team. Seeing this, Rudiger-shi seemed to laugh with a hint of irony.

"Xenovia Quarta on her own is certainly a very strong player. Basically, all she needs to do is grab the ball, and then she can be allowed to move around as she likes. That's what she thinks as well. But, if anything happens to her comrades, she'll do everything necessary to support them. Of course, that's also because she has the ability to do so. —But, if she tries to do too much, then there's a chance that she'll reveal openings."

Xenovia had increased her own mobility and defensive scope in order to help Irina-san — but the vulnerabilities in her defence also grew larger at the same time, so the Angels seized this opportunity to break through Xenovia's defences.

<< Again, the reincarnated Angel team has scored again—!>>

And then, they scored more points. Rudiger-shi looked at the display as if he had been expecting that to happen.

"Look, Xenovia Quarta took responsibility for the area that Shidou Irina failed to respond to, and this has revealed a small gap in their defences."

Rudiger-shi leaned against the back of his chair while putting his elbow against the armrest to support his face as he said

"If I recall, Xenovia Quarta…is the Student Council President of a Japanese high school, or so I've heard. She has a greater sense of responsibility than before, and her views have also widened a fair bit. Hence, compared to her previous focus on a strong offense, it's easier for her to reveal openings now. Although she hasn't realised this herself, it's quite obvious from an objective third-person point of view."

It was certainly true that Xenovia was constantly monitoring the condition of her comrades during the match, and she often took on more subtle roles such as assisting or passing. Compared to how she was in the past, Xenovia was doing much more right now. …But just as Rudiger-shi said, Xenovia was unable to focus solely on offense. Rias-neesan narrowed her eyes.

"…You've even perceived the changes in Xenovia's personality, so to speak."

The display then switched to show Ise-kun's subordinate Bova-san who seemed to be struggling in battle. He was doing his best to try and take the ball, and he spewed out the flaming breath of a dragon — but the Angels completely ignored it and didn't try to oppose him as an opponent. Anyone could see that Bova-san was quite anxious right now. Whilst looking at the display, Rudiger-shi said

"Bova Tannin idolises Hyoudou Issei, and he wishes to demonstrate his strength and

rapid success to his exceptional older brother and father. He acts upon the instructions of Hyoudou Issei, but doesn't produce very good results — instead of trying to conceal his irritation, he's actually exacerbating it. Although Hyoudou Issei and his teammates try to pacify him, his response is only superficial…"

Ravel-san tried to coax Bova-san…but he was still being ignored by the Angels. Bova-san's anger seemed unquenchable as he continuously let loose fireballs from his mouth, and as a result, he even hindered the movements of his own teammates. Taking advantage of this opportunity, a goal had been made against Ise-kun's team again. Rudiger-shi shook his head

"These actions are overly aggressive, and will only hinder one's teammates. And then, he'll be hit by the feeling of his own powerlessness. For a dragon with a lofty sense of pride, this feeling — is unbearable."

As the game continued on, the Angels suddenly became enveloped in a gentle light. At the same time, all of the injuries that they had sustained whilst stealing the ball were healed. It came from the Ace of Raphael-sama of the Four Great Seraphim, Diethelm Waldseemüller's Sacred Gear [Holy Resuscitation][111]. It was a pre-emptive ability that would automatically activate its healing ability after a set period of time or after taking damage. And his Balance Breaker — [Fourteen Holy Salvation][121] had an increased area of effect as well as a wider range of symptoms that could be cured. If the target was a believer, even a serious illness could be completely cured. Needless to say, Asia-san who was vital to Ise-kun's team also let out rays of healing light to treat the injuries of her team members. Rossweisse-san was also using magic to support Irina-san, Xenovia and Bova-san. The match had yet to reach its worst point. More than half the time had already passed in the match, so players from both sides were already breathing heavily and seemed tired because they had been moving around back and forth. It was clear that Ise-kun's team seemed worse off in terms of stamina expenditure though. Ravel-san's figure appeared on the display. Her breathing was very rapid, and the flaming wings on her back had also shrunk in size a fair bit. Rudiger-shi said

"Due to the lack of coordination between the players, Ravel Phoenix must fully exert her mind as the strategist, so she's wearing down not just her body, but also her mind."

Although such a comment was made about Ravel-san, her eyes were still sharp, and near the goal, she carefully observed the movements made by both sides and gave instructions to her teammates so as not to allow the other team to score. At that time, Ravel-san seemed to notice something and she called out

[Bina-sama, please dodge!]

After the masked [Queen] was warned — Bina Lessthan moved away. Bina-san had also noticed something as she looked towards the surface of the ground. All of a sudden, an enormous spear of light burst forward and broke through the ground as it rose upwards. Bina-san smoothly dodged…. Not far away, Gabriel-sama's Ace — Mirana Shatarova seemed a bit regretful.

[…It missed huh.]

I had heard that she was a master in using the power of light. She practised a variety

of methods utilising light, and the technique in which she fired a spear of light up from the ground was one of those. But I was also quite surprised that Bina-san was able to evade that attack so easily…. But just at that moment, something happened to Bina-san. A crack appeared on her mask, and along with the sound of a crisp snap, the mask broke. Shown in front of everyone was — brilliant long silver hair, and the face of a beautiful girl who seemed to be of similar age to us. All of the cameras panned across and homed in as the announcer excitedly roared

<<W-W-W-Whaaaaaat! Bina-shi's mask has been broken and her true identity has been revealed! The true identity of the [Queen] of the Sekiryuutei team has always been shrouded in mystery, but it turns out that she's actually such a pretty young lady. What a surprise!>>

The person who immediately responded to this was — Rias-neesan. She stood straight up and widened her eyes, but she was speechless. And then her expression turned serious — and it seemed to show pain. Bina-san created a small magic circle with her hand to take out a spare mask, and then she put it on as if nothing had happened to return to her usual masked appearance. Ravel-san adjusted her breathing and then said once again

[Everyone, please be careful of Mirana Shatarova-san's light abilities! She was chosen as Gabriel-sama's Ace, and the reason for that — is the density of her light!]

Rudiger-shi then proudly said

"Hehe, even an ultimate-class Devil would be vaporised if they took a direct hit from Mirana's light. That's how dense it is. Incredibly thick."

But Ravel-san had observed that well. She noticed Mirana-san's plans before anyone else and was able to help her teammates. Bina-san also seemed to have made a few slight mistakes which the opposing side noticed, and that was why they had targeted her. But I couldn't help but admire Ravel-san for her ability to see through this. Rudiger-shi also expressed his approval of Ravel.

"The daughter of the Phoenix family…is certainly talented. She has a good grasp of the overall situation. Most likely, she's able to visualise the movements of both sides on the field in her mind to give instructions. She's able to accurately grasp the abilities of the team's members and produce a response, and keep a watchful eye on the opposing team as well. However, there are still some things that she cannot see."

Rudiger-shi supported his chin with one hand as he said

"—Every member of the team has their own way of living, their own opinions, and their own personality. And that's why each person has a dream that they wish to embrace, and a darkness that they carry within them. Even if they polish their techniques and strengthen their body, they'll simply collapse if they lack mental strength. If this situation expands within the team, then that will lead to a collapse."

Irina-san and Bova-san had already reached the limits of their physical and mental capacities, and their movements had become stiff. Xenovia's reactions were also gradually slowing down. Rudiger-shi asserted

"Lady Ravel Phoenix is a rare talent. But she has the trait of [supremacy]. She is the complete opposite of Hyoudou Issei's [kingship]. That has been displayed very

clearly in this match. All of the members of his team have a promising future. — However, they're still just teenagers. As youths, they still have immature personalities, and so cooperation does not exist for them. Overcoming this is impossible in just a dozen or so years."

Rudiger-shi had already told Dulio-san and the others about the weaknesses of Irina-san, Bova-san, and Xenovia. By skilfully utilising this information in the game, they were able to generate a profound impact on the minds and bodies of Irina-san and the others. …We're still young. We lack experience, and so when faced with a psychological attack — we can't fully respond. Rias-neesan was unable to reply back with anything.

"…That really hits a sore spot."

"They are strong. You guys as well. But regardless of whether it's them or you, you all still have human emotions such as joy and worry. —All I'm doing is aiming for these things. I've never thought of myself as a perfect person, nor a good strategist."

Rudiger-shi removed a chess piece from his pocket — he spoke while playing with the bishop piece in his hand.

"I'm able to win in a lot of games because high-class Devils are immersed in rationalism and the high society that they are unable to extricate themselves from. They treat pieces as mere pieces, and even the field is nothing more than a checkerboard."

He turned his gaze towards Rias-neesan as he said

"You should be able to understand, Princess Rias…how foolish it is to look at your own pieces as mere pieces on a chessboard. Unlike chess pieces, your servants — reincarnated Devils are alive. Everyone has their own way of thinking, their own heart, and their own feelings. That is especially so for those who used to be human. Humans have a culture that doesn't lose to the Devils, and there is a limit to how much you can try to deny their ideas, deny their culture, and try to order them as chess pieces. It might be debatable when it comes to non-humans, but they're still creatures with emotions. That's how simple and logical the situation is, yet the aristocratic Devils are unable to understand. No, perhaps it would be better to say that they've never wanted to understand it."

Rudiger-shi asked me

"Kiba Yuuto-kun, you're also a former human. From your point of view, do you feel the same about what I just said? When you realise that the opponent you're fighting against has the same feelings as yourself—. These kinds of things are natural. But, it's such an obvious thing that doesn't exist in the professional Rating Games. Players who are high-class Devils simply regard it as an extension of chess. With their own servants — the chess pieces are simply treated like live versions."

Rudiger-shi placed the piece on top of the chair's armrest, and then declared

"Devils are conceited because of their superior existence in the supernatural world, and this arrogance is exposed in the Rating Games."

"And, the one painting that image is…Rudiger-sama."

Hearing Rias-neesan's words, Rudiger-shi showed a sorrowful expression.

"Regarding that…I don't think it's flattering, nor something worth feeling proud about, Princess. I just want to compete in an ordinary game. Of course, the top rankers such as Diehauser are well aware of this when they stand on the field. Even so, there are many others who make it into the top ranks. But when it comes down to the bottom line, all I want to do is enjoy a pure game."

Rudiger Rosenkreutz's expression became rather solemn when he recalled Diehauser Belial, but he also seemed a bit proud. —All of a sudden, a change occurred within the game. A mysterious bubble appeared on the field. Ise-kun was actually inside the bubble. Ise-kun had been trapped by the mysterious bubble. Seeing this, Rudiger-shi revealed an eloquent smile.

"It looks like we'll be able to see that one."

<<What's going on!? All of a sudden, a mysterious bubble has appeared on the field! Hyoudou Issei-senshu has been trapped within it, just what is this mystery space—!? >>

Following the announcer's cry, a mysterious voice was heard.

[Come on, Gabriel-sama. Please.]

[B-But…it's so embarrassing. I'm actually dressed like this…! How shameless…!]

[This is also for the sake of the 'reincarnated Angel' team, so that they can feel motivated in the Rating Games!]

That voice — it seemed to be coming from inside the bubble. After Ise-kun heard Gabriel-sama's voice, he yelled out

[G-Gabriel-san! The bubble is actually showing a video of Gabriel-san!?]

It seemed as though the bubble was displaying a video that only Ise-kun could see. All of a sudden, a noseblood gushed out from inside Ise-kun's armour.

[Nnnnggggghhhhhhh! Gabriel-san, sheeeee! Gabriel-san, iiissssssssss!]

Ise-kun shouted out in a loud voice that seemed to be filled with joy! Rudiger-shi spoke with a serious tone

"What I had Dulio and the others prepare was — a sexy video of the Seraph Gabriel. It was developed as a technique to restrain the Sekiryuutei within that bubble."

—What! They went to all the trouble of getting a Seraph to do something like this!? N-No, in order to seal Ise-kun, the Sekiryuutei, perhaps this much is necessary!? Ise-kun always wanted to see Gabriel-sama's breasts, so something this appealing was like a spell!

<<The voice that we heard from the field is apparently from a video of some kind that was prepared by the reincarnated Angels, and it is currently deployed only in front of Hyoudou Issei-senshu!>>

While the announcer explained that to the audience, more voices from inside the bubble were heard.

[…D-Do I have to wear this?]

[Yes, Gabriel-sama. By wearing this swimsuit, the [Brave Saints] will be saved. … You must become their weapon!]

[B-But, the area of this fabric…is almost non-existent.]

[Please wear it!]

[Uuh, yes…I'll wear it]

After listening to this conversation, Ise-kun—.

[Gaaaaaaaaaahhhhh! Gaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!]

He screamed out with joy that could not be conveyed in words!

[Ise-samaaaaaaaa! Please be caaarrrreeefullllll!]

The voice of his manager Ravel-san was not going to reach him! Rudiger-shi confidently said

"I did some research to determine that the Sekiryuutei's weakness is bikinis which have a very small fabric area. I also heard that you and the others often dress like that for him Princess Rias, and that he becomes rather excited."

—They even researched this and incorporated it into their tactics!? I-I see, this made it even more convincing as to how Rudiger-shi was able to climb up to the seventh rank in the Rating Games…I convinced myself that it was the case. Ise-kun seemed to have become a captive of the bubble's video.

[Uhooh! G-Gabriel-sama's…aaaahhh! Even this appearance too! She's even wearing that one tooooooooo!]

"The school swimsuit — an old-style swimsuit. Of course, it's not only swimsuits. There is also transparent negligee and athletics clothing being worn by female Angels one by one, along with Gabriel-sama. That's what's being displayed right now in front of the Sekiryuutei. —Princess Rias, the scene of your approaches towards the Sekiryuutei are now being perfectly reproduced by the most beautiful girls in all of Heaven. …This is the Sekiryuutei sealing technique."

Rudiger-shi spoke with a serious expression, while Ise-kun continued to let out yelps of joy.

[T-This is truly a feast for my eyes!]

—It was incredibly effective! Ise-kun was unable to focus on the match occurring around him at all!

"…The Ise sealing technique that one of the best players in the Underworld has prepared…is actually such a terrifying tactic!"

Rias-neesan…felt incredibly intimidated…. But I stared blankly, not knowing how to react! What is this!? They were having a serious discussion about the Rating Game just then, and all of that disappeared the next second!

“…This is the worst.”

Beside me, Koneko-chan could only stare in amazement at Ise-kun as well!

<<If someone was to see the nude body of the great Angel Gabriel-sama, I think any male would be totally absorbed by her regardless of race or origin. I’m so envious, Oppai Dragon!>>

The announcer expressed his envy.

<<It’s a terrifying tactic. As expected of Rudiger. Hyoudou Issei-kun’s weakness has

been completely exploited.>>

Beelzebub-sama marvelled.

<<Asia-tan's school swimsuit is peach-flavoured.>>

Fafnir mentioned the flavour of Asia-san's swimsuit—. In terms of the physical and psychological battle, Ise-kun's team was under all kinds of pressure from Dulio-san's team which Rudiger-shi was supervising.

"This approach is certainly as one would expect of Rudiger-sama. But, please don't underestimate Ise and the others."

Even though Rias-neesan was surprised by Rudiger Rosenkreutz's tactics, she still believed in the victory of her beloved man.

"—Even a god-class being would feel that after enduring an overly cruel year, they have become truly strong. This is not something that they cannot overcome. Look, they've already begun their counterattack."

Rias-neesan was looking at Bova-san, who was shown on one knee on the screen. The reincarnated Angels — Diethelm-san and several other players surrounded Bova-san and Nakiri-kun. Both Bova-san and Nakiri-kun looked fatigued. But Bova-san stood back up despite the trembling of his knees.

[…What's wrong, Angels, Church warriors? Do you think mere attacks like that are enough to knock me, Bova, down?]

[……You can still stand, Tannin's son?]

Bova-san stood there valiantly

[It's only natural that I stand up. I will stand — because I am the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth]'s first subordinate…! More importantly, my lord has given me an order to make me the 'fang' of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth]. So I absolutely cannot be broken…!]

The Angel behind Bova-san threw a spear of light — but Nakiri-kun beside him blocked it, and he even kicked the Angel away. Nakiri-kun took a deep breath, and let out a creaking noise as he flexed his neck.

[It looks like you can still fight, Bobo.]

[You brat! Don't give me unnecessary duplications, next heir of the Nakiri clan. This is a battle to demonstrate my loyalty to Lord Hyoudou!]

[If you say that, then I'll also want to make senpai win the game. If I fall here, won't this just bring shame to Hyoudou-senpai?]

Nakiri-kun took off his tattered uniform, exposing his highly-trained body. Diethelm-san said

[So you're the heir of the Nakiri clan that belongs to the [Five Principal Clans] of Japan's special ability users group huh.]

[That's right, Seraph Raphael's Ace-dono. As part of my spiritual training, I will fight

under the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth]![]

His body was enveloped in touki and a dragon's aura, his physical abilities increased by a level, and Nakiri-kun charged forward!

[—So let me fight against you as the 'fist' of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth]![]

Nakiri-kun was so fast that my eyes could barely keep up as he shrunk the distance between himself and Diethelm-san, and prepared to launch a series of punches coated in touki and dragon's aura at Diethelm-san. Diethelm-san dodged several times, but he still took a hit to his face, causing his body to stagger backwards significantly.

[Typical power types! I'll deal with you from a ranged distance![]

He then jumped back and manifested several spears of light in his hands. Diethelm-san planned to use long-range attacks. But, Nakiri-kun didn't seem to care as he expanded the touki around his body.

[—Then, please come back here.]

Nakiri-kun released touki from his entire body, and as if in response, the ground around him seemed to uplift. Even the ground underneath Dielthelm-san bulged up, and like a horizontally moving escalator, the movements of the ground quickly brought Raphael-sama's Ace towards him!

[What!? I had heard that you would use earth-attributed techniques, but I never expected…![]

Nakiri-kun controlled the ground, caught Diethelm-san off-guard, and brought him back towards himself! After shortening their distance in an instant, Nakiri-kun thrust a touki-coated fist out towards Diethelm-san.

[Hmph, let's start with one hit.]

He was sent hurtling backwards!

<<Incredible! The Sekiryuutei team's Nakiri-senshu used a terrain-changing technique to bring the reincarnated Angel player right in front of himself—!>>

The announcer was also astounded by what had just occurred.

[I made a contract with the Sacred Beast [Ouryuu] that governs the earth. These are the benefits of that.]

Nakiri-kun said. It was the same as the rumours I had heard. —As long as the next head of the Nakiri clan stands on the ground, he'll be able to borrow an almost infinite amount of 'ki' from the dragon's veins. Thus he was able to utilise an endless supply of touki. Because this was a field prepared for the game, he wasn't able to borrow an infinite amount of energy, but based on what was happening, he seemed to be gaining something from it. Although Nakiri-kun seemed rather worn out right now, touki was still surrounding his entire body.

[It's finally time. Allow me to show you one of the secret techniques of mine that you guys don't know about.]

After saying that, Nakiri-kun's enormous touki further expanded and then it exploded all at once! After the touki that was vigorously released dissipated — what appeared there was a humanoid dragon. A golden humanoid dragon! Not only that, his head, arms and legs had all grown larger, and both his height and torso had expanded! His entire body had gotten larger!

<<Unbelievable! Nakiri-senshu has actually transformed into a dragon-like form—!>>

The announcer was constantly surprised by the new techniques that Nakiri-kun was unveiling. Nakiri-kun said

[As long as I continue to gain strength from the dragon's veins, my body can also undergo changes. The name of this technique is — [Dragon Man].]

In other words, it meant that the Sacred Beast [Ouryuu] had manifested in his body! Diethelm-san stood back up, seemingly impressed

[You actually turned yourself into a dragon…]

[Isn't that rather fitting for someone called the 'fist' of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth]? I've always admired Hyoudou-senpai's armour.]

Bova-san laughed upon seeing Nakiri-kun's transformation.

[Kukuku…human…no, Kouchin. Since you've transformed into that, I should also liven things up. Be careful that I don't trample over you while I show everyone my might!]

[So you're calling me Kouchin huh!]

The two dragons who admired Ise-kun finally shared a common goal, and they sent their gazes towards the bubble that Ise-kun was trapped in. Bova-san's chest expanded…and he spewed forth an enormous fireball from his mouth! At the same time, Nakiri-kun generated a giant ball of touki from his hands, and he hurled it out together with the fireball! The two forces touched each other in mid-air, and they combined into an even more formidable force instead of cancelling each other out as it continued to make a beeline for Ise-kun's bubble! In order to counteract this force, the Angels made their best effort to throw spears of light at it — but the force released by the two dragons who admired the Sekiryuutei continued on its path as the spears of light were deflected, and the bubble — was finally destroyed!

[…Kuuhh! It was certainly amazing inside, but I can't keep dreaming forever!]

After emerging from it, Ise-kun's attitude instantly changed, and he snatched the ball from an Angel who was there beside him. In order to score, he began to fight intensely against the reincarnated Angels—. On the other hand, Xenovia seemed to be gasping for air. It was the first time that I had seen her breathing so heavily. Her opponent — was Nero Raimondi, who was dressed like a superhero.

[What's wrong Xenovia? Could it be that this power idiot is feeling tired?]

[…You can say whatever you want, Nero. The good stuff begins now. In any case, you sure are energetic.]

In response to Xenovia's words, Nero-kun enthusiastically struck a pose.

[This is the thing that I'm the proudest of! Even back when you were still a warrior, my stamina didn't lose out to you! Of course, as I am currently [Captain Angel], I won't falter under any circumstances!]

Seeing Nero-kun like this, cheers came from the children sitting amongst the audience members.

[Go, Captain!]

[You have to win, Captain Angel!]

The children from the church were doing their best to cheer for him. —Nero Raimondi was the Ace of the Seraph Uriel. …There were rumours that ever since he had a little sister with no resistance to her Sacred Gear, he continuously encouraged children who suffered from the erosion of their Sacred Gears, and he wore this hero outfit for them. Wearing this outfit, Nero-kun stood here in the tournament with a strong determination among the Angels.

[Ise-sama! The time is ripe!]

Observing Xenovia's condition, Ravel-san gave a signal to Ise-kun. From the jewels of Ise-kun's armour, he released many miniature dragons — he manifested the wyverns.

[Got it! Wyverns!]

Ise-kun directed the wyverns as he flew through the air.

[—What!? The Sekiryuutei is using wyverns!]

[Is he planning to increase the power of warrior Xenovia!?]

The Angels were all familiar with Ise-kun's abilities as they became wary of the wyverns. As if they already had a plan to deal with them, they immediately responded.

[But, that was also within our expectations. We've already marked all of the tired players who will receive a power transfer—]

The wyverns — affixed themselves to Xenovia's body, turning into gauntlets, boots, and eventually a set of armour that encased her entire body! …And appearing in that spot was a female swordsman clad in red armour.

[A power-up is a power-up. But—]

Xenovia briskly swung Durandal in a wide arc!

[This is my own power-up by equipping armour!]

<<Wow! Who would have thought that Xenovia-senshu would wear the same armour as the Sekiryuutei—!>>

This technique was originally a combination technique with Rias-neesan — [Crimson Extinct Dragonar]! Xenovia was wearing the armour now though! Nero-kun seemed taken aback by this.

[I-It can't be! According to the information, [Crimson Extinct Dragonar] should be the

combination technique with Rias Gremory!]

Xenovia held the holy sword Durandal while wearing the Sekiryuutei's crimson armour and spoke with a powerful tone

[Yeah, this is similar to the technique with Master Rias. —This one is called [Crimson Destruction Dragonar]!]

Seeing that, Rias-neesan — revealed a bitter smile at Xenovia's transformation.

"That girl, even my privilege…. Fufufu, but that's also an interesting move."

Rias-neesan asked Rudiger-shi about Xenovia's transformation.

"Rudiger-sama, was this also within your expectations?"

"……"

Rudiger-shi didn't answer. But, he watched on intently at Ise-kun's team as they revealed their special techniques one after the other. Xenovia wielded Durandal whilst donning the crimson armour.

[—Let me demonstrate the kind of power that I have wielding this holy sword with the armour of the Sekiryuutei!]

With a single swing, a large crater was generated upon the surrounding terrain in an instant, and the surroundings had completely changed. In addition, she was able to evade Nero's attacks with a speed even faster than before.

[Kuh! What speed and power!]

Nero-kun couldn't help but complain.

[Not only has her power increased, even her speed has gone up…! Not bad, Xenovia! No, [Crimson Destruction Dragonar].]

Nero-kun spoke with a hero-like tone. —But, Xenovia actually seemed a little shy.

[…It's a bit embarrassing when you say that so forthrightly. But aren't you intimidated after seeing this power of mine?]

[Didn't I say it before? I am [Captain Angel] and I won't falter under any circumstances! Also! You're not the only one who has a secret technique like this, Xenovia!]

Nero-kun used his accumulated energy and released brilliant silver rays of light from his body the next instant! There was a clear change in pressure. —He had also attained it.

[Based on what you're saying, I assume it's your Balance Breaker!]

Xenovia fired a wave of aura from her blade as she swung it towards Nero-kun — but Nero-kun didn't seem to care as he laughed heartily.

[—[Sturdy Saint Withstand][131]! Its ability is simple and clear! The more I'm attacked, the stronger my defences! Here I come! Holy fist!]

Both sides preferred frontal attacks, and Xenovia and Nero-kun began a fierce melee battle—. On the other hand, Ise-kun held the ball and had the advantage — but he was already under the close watch of Dulio-san. Ise-kun fought to protect the ball as he said

[Heh, I think it'd be much easier if I sent all of you flying in one go after putting on my black armour! But, there's no point in doing that this time, so I'll just use it in a different way!]

Ise-kun raised his left arm up into the air and then chanted

[The jet-black God of Infinity! The glorious God of Dreams! Watch over the false forbidden existence we shall become that transcends the boundaries!]

"[<<Dragon ∞ Drive!!!!!!>>]"

And then, a red and black aura swirled around his left arm, so that only one part underwent Dragon Deification! Partial transformation! He was actually able to use Dragon Deification in this manner! The announcer cried out

<<What!? After Hyoudou Issei recited what sounded like the chant for the black armour…wow! Only the gauntlet of his left arm has changed into the form of that armour!? What's going on here, Beelzebub-sama!?>>

<<I see, it was well thought out. A partial transformation. Compared to a full transformation, using a partial transformation can help with reducing the stamina consumption…this must be a new technique that was developed with that in mind.>>

Just as Beelzebub-sama had said, Ise-kun's idea had allowed this technique to be developed. In this case, although its power wouldn't be as great as a full transformation, the duration should be much longer.

[Even though it's only a partial transformation, please look forward to my power!]

After Ise-kun said that, all of the reincarnated Angels that had marked him were sent flying by the aura that was released from his gauntlet. Dulio-san was also stunned and he couldn't help but laugh

[Hehehe! As expected of Ise-kun! Seriously, you've shown us some unexpected moves one after the other! The Sekiryuutei team are unexpectedly good defenders; with this parade of killer techniques, I don't think I'll get bored at all!]

That's right! Regardless of whether it was Nakiri-kun, Xenovia, or Ise-kun, they relied on these new and unexpected techniques to regain the advantage just when we thought they had been forced into a corner! Ise-kun's target — was Mirana-san!

[Moreover, it can also be used like this! Mirana-san! I'm going to stop you in your tracks!]

Ise-kun opened his left hand and concentrated his aura.

[Breast Power Wave!]

A powerful dragon god aura touched Mirana-san, and her movements were completely halted! Ise-kun strengthened his power even further as he clenched his left hand! [Dress Break DD!]

At the same time that he called out its name, Mirana-san's sister outfit — was completely shredded apart! Shown on the display was her nude body—. —Ah, I felt so sorry for her that I looked away. Beside me, Koneko-chan quietly expressed her heartfelt emotions

"…Relying on the power of Dragon Deification, he can activate it without even touching, that worst technique has actually evolved…"

Indeed, Ise-kun had borrowed the power of Dragon Deification to strip a girl of her clothing from a long distance without needing to touch them. So this was the technique that he had learned. This…was truly a wicked weapon against all women.

[…Noo, this is so depraved…]

Mirana-san's wailing could be heard.

<<Wow wow wow! Hyoudou Issei-senshu's Dress Break! The ability to shred an opponent's clothing without touching them has been demonstrated here!>>

The announcer shouted.

"…I think it was Ise's idea…no, I'm sure a part of it was also Ravel's idea. In any case, although its output will decrease somewhat, the variety and surprise factor has more or less increased."

Rias-neesan brushed the topic of Dress Break aside, and instead praised the partial Dragon Deification part of it. To Rias-neesan, this was also a technique that belonged to her own peerage. So it was good news for her too. —At that time, Rudiger-shi laughed

"…Fufufu."

Rias-neesan looked at Rudgier-shi with surprise. Rudiger-shi said

"That was impolite. How do I say this…it's just as Dulio said. —They really are an unbelievable team. Even though we expected that some new techniques would be prepared. But…they actually threw them all out like this without any hesitation; I have no words left to say. Their greatest weapon is youth. I had also perceived perversion as his weakness, but it's true that it's also his greatest weapon. We always have surprise and growth in our youth. It's because of this that my tactics were defeated, Princess Rias."

Rudiger-shi shrugged as he frankly evaluated the techniques of Ise-kun and his team. Rudiger-shi…merrily spoke to himself.

"In this case, the players on my side will fall into thoughts such as — 'is there another secret technique?'…. Even to serve as a warning to this side, the effect is clearly apparent. I see, Princess Ravel Phoenix. So you also accounted for the growth and lack of experience arising from youth huh…. The most interesting things are the team members who were able to demonstrate this idea, as well as the influence of the [King]—"

Rudiger-shi — looked up and closed his eyes as a complex expression surfaced on his face.

"……Rudiger-sama?"

Rias-neesan asked…. Rudiger-shi's eyes were staring into a distant location.

"…Diehauser, are you seeing this? The things that we lack are right here. …The things that we were longing for…are right here. Hey, Diehauser…"

Notes

1. Kanji was Restoration from the Healing Saint
2. Kanji was Salvation from Fourteen Healing Saints.
3. Kanji was Saint's Trial and Next Trial.
4. It would be pronounced as 'Dress Break D D', not double D. The kanji was Dress Break・Dragon God Style.

Life.Youth

Because of this Youth

Part I

Nearly two hours had already passed since the beginning of the battle against Dulio's team—. In other words, the game was coming to a close. I — Hyoudou Issei was regulating my breathing.

"…Haahaa…although I'm fairly confident in my own stamina, running around back and forth like this is quite harsh."

I gasped heavily, enduring the pain that intensified at the sides of my abdomen. For a partial transformation of Dragon Deification, only the final part of the chant was required each time to change one part into the black armour…of course, it would still consume a considerable amount of stamina. However, I was still able to use it several times. In terms of the current situation, a partial transformation was more suitable than a full transformation. —Both sides were reaching the limits of their endurance, and the battle was finally progressing into its final stage. The score was…[141 – 146]. After using that move earlier, Dulio, the Aces and the other reincarnated Angels all used their combined formations against us. But we didn't allow ourselves to be outdone, and we fought back against every move they made. Our opponent's score was currently greater than ours…but there was still time for a reversal.

"Ise-sama, the next goal has appeared in F6 again."

Ravel informed me of the location of the newly-appeared goal. We constantly drove and urged on our physically exhausted bodies towards our aim of victory. …There was a large volume of sweat perspiring from my body underneath my armour. No matter how much water I drank, it wouldn't be enough to replenish this. But, the game was coming to an end. —We must win at the end!

"Let's win this!"

I loudly declared, and my comrades responded with

[Yeeaaahhh!]

Dulio was currently in possession of the ball. He held onto the ball as he flew straight towards the next goal. We were following right behind him. Based on the remaining time in the game, I was afraid that with the next goal, or perhaps the one after that, the game would end. —If we didn't score consecutively, then we wouldn't stand a chance! After gradually regaining their own rhythm, Irina and Xenovia closed in on Dulio while he held the ball and they planned to snatch it off him. If we allowed the [King] Dulio, or the [Queen] Diethelm-san to score, the difference in our points would widen even further. But the swordsman Shinra Kiyotora-san stood in the way of Irina and Xenovia wielding two ethereal katanas that had been given to him by the Vatican. In order to support those two, Rossweisse-san fired off large bursts of offensive magic. Mirana-san created an extremely large spear of light (its power was almost on the same level as a Fallen Angel Cadre) to easily obliterate her spells. Griselda-san then joined the fray with her bow and arrows. The arrows fired off by Griselda-san were incredibly accurate, forcing Rossweisse-san to retreat from acting as their support. As the commander, while Ravel issued orders to everyone, she

released flames towards her opponents to prevent them from passing the ball. The female reincarnated Angel — the other Queen Jessica Lagerkvist-san (a Church warrior with blonde hair and blue eyes who always seemed rather sleepy, but was also a beautiful woman!) used the power of light to create a solid barrier-type technique several times to block Ravel's attacks. Nakiri and Bova's highly destructive attacks were intended to penetrate the gaps in the enemy team's formation, but the opposing male Angel — Ryuu Heikan who was a 10 (a Chinese martial artist who used the power of light as the core of his fighting style) and Nero blocked those. Amidst the intense battle, Bina-shi calmly gave me a signal with her eyes, and she accompanied me as we charged towards Diethelm-san who held the ball — but at that time, Dulio yelled out as he intervened

"I won't hand the ball over to you!"

And a battle involving the [King] and [Queen] of both sides broke out. Like this, we competed for the ball back and forth with no rest, and the endurance of both teams was reaching its limits, so all of our movements slowed down, and our breathing grew quicker and heavier. Regardless of whether it was the opposing side or our side, everyone had reached their limits. At that time, a gasping Xenovia spoke to me whilst clad in armour.

"…I still have a final trump card! …Ise! I have a way to make use of my true power!"

"..Really!? Well, hearing such news is music for my ears! Please let me see it!"

I never expected that Xenovia would still have another technique hidden up her sleeve. Hearing me say that, Xenovia seemed to gain a strange sense of enthusiasm all of a sudden.

"…Alright. I'll get ready then. By the way! Depending on your response, there's a possibility that I may collapse and I won't be able to get back up again, Ise!"

—What!? What did you say!? You might collapse because of my response!? What kind of secret technique have you been hiding from me, Xenovia!? Xenovia took a deep breath, and then

"My [King]! Hyoudou Issei! Please!"

Xenovia's voice echoed throughout the entire venue.

"MAKE ME YOUR BRIIIIIIIIIIDDDDDDDDDDEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!"

"……!"

…….

…W-What did you saaaaaaaayyy!? B-B-B-Briiiiiiiddddddeeeeeee!? The unprecedented confession petrified me! But, the announcer was still commentating live!

<<…What!? A development like this has actually occurred! In the midst of this battle, the Sekiryuutei team's Xenovia-senshu has actually, suddenly, made a reverse-proposaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaal!?>>

I-Indeed, it certainly is a reverse-proposal! I, Hyoudou Issei, male, have been

reverse-proposed to by Xenovia! W-Why did you have to y-yell out a confession like that right now!? Ah, but this is something that Xenovia would do, though of all times, it had to be now! Xenovia's entire body trembled as she nervously asked me

"Hey, w-what's your response!? P-Please, Ise! H-Hurry up and tell me! I-If you keep making me wait, I might collapse in various senses!"

Uuh, you need me to give a response!? I have to give a good response, especially since it's also the girl who proposed to me, so I won't even be a man if I don't respond! It's time to make up my mind and respond. At that time — Irina interjected!

"W-Wait! P-Please also take me — Shidou Irina, as your bride! Please, Ise-kun!"

W-W-W-What did you say, what is going ooooooooooooooooooonnnnnnn!? This time it's Irina!? Right here and now, first it was Xenovia…and then Irina who confessed to me! The announcer also spoke in a frenzy due to the unexpected consecutive confessions of these two!

<<WWWWWHHHAAAAAAAAATTT!? Even Shidou Irina-senshu has made a reverse-proposaaaaaaaaal! What's happening!? What kind of situation is this!? This is a consecutive reverse-proposal that has never been seen before in the Rating Games!>>

Right you are! How is it possible to have two consecutive reverse-proposals in a Rating Game!? The announced continued

<<There was also a previous proposal that was made to Himejima Akeno-san. But I never envisioned that the Sekiryuutei team would present even more confessions and proposals in the midst of a game! Gee, what am I supposed to say here… anyway, I am also looking forward to the Sekiryuutei's response! What about you, Beelzebub-sama!?>>

<<Fufufu, yes. Well, we'll have to wait and see how the Sekiryuutei-dono responds, right?>>

Aaaahh, even Beelzebub-sama is joining in!

"So these kinds of engagements also exist! I-I see, I have learned something!"

Rossweisse-san also seemed to have gained some kind of strange courage!

…….

…But, bride huh. I proposed to Rias and Akeno-san. I swore to them that I would make them happy. So, do I like Xenovia and Irina? Do I cherish them? ……Of course I love them! I've already kissed them several times! It's impossible not to realise this! Of course I value them! Xenovia has already become one of my peerage members! Irina is also my childhood friend…she didn't choose the reincarnated Angel team, but me instead! Like this, they proposed to me because they want me to take them home as brides—. Since my aim is to become a Harem King, I'm obviously not going to withdraw here, isn't that right, Azazel-sensei!? I steeled my determination, took a deep breath, and then let everything out in one breath

"…Geez! I get it! I'll take full responsibility! Come with me, Irina, Xenoviaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

There was a moment of silence. And the next instant, from the bodies and holy swords of the two female swordsmen — an unbelievable aura surged forth!

“…Fufufu, fufufufufufufufu.”

“Ufufu…ufufufufufufufufu♪”

Xenovia and Irina couldn’t help but laugh out with joy—.

“We succeeded!”

“We did it!”

““We’re engaged to him!””

As if all of their fatigue was blown away, the two of them flew about in the air and charged towards the other team with incredible momentum. The two of them chased the Angel holding the ball, while the remaining Angels stood in front of them to block their path…. But with their superb coordination, the Angels standing in their path were all blown away! Seeing this, the other Angels were all stunned.

“Kuh! At the end of this when we’re all supposed to be dead tired, they can actually…!”

“This power! These movements! It’s difficult to believe that this is the appearance of two people who are on the verge of exhaustion!”

Xenovia took out Excalibur and then pointed its tip towards the player holding the ball.

“Hmm!”

She seemed to say something — and then the ball actually moved by itself, and flew in a straight line towards Xenovia! At this final juncture, they were still able to demonstrate such energy! Xenovia spoke whilst filled with confidence

“As I am right now, I could even take down a Maou!”

“It’ll be troublesome if a Devil defeats a Maou! But, I get you! I understand, Xenovia!”

Irina was also full of energy, and she used the holy aura of Hauteclere to send Angels flying left and right. Xenovia said to me

“Ise! We need to have at least five children! Three boys and two girls! I absolutely won’t retreat on this!”

“I-I actually want at least two children as well! A boy and a girl at the very least!”

W-W-What are you two saying!? Are we still in a game right now!? This immense embarrassment made me want to hide in a corner! But, Xenovia still continued to express her dreams with a flushed red face.

“They’ll go to a private school! And of course, starting from kindergarten! Education is the most important thing, and that comes from my personal experience!”

“Eh!? Xenovia has already thought about things so far ahead!? I-I…should I choose public, or private…!”

Just as they were conversing with each other like that, Griselda-san from the opposing team flew over, and she began to lecture Xenovia!

“Geez, what a child you are! You didn’t even say a word about this proposal to your older sister, what on earth were you thinking!?”

“Sister Griselda, this is the beginning of your little sister’s journey in a new life. Please rejoice!”

“When we get back, I’ll give you a good lecture!”

And then a showdown between the Quarta sisters began! Xenovia was marked by Griselda-san, and the ball — was passed to Elmenhilde. Although Elmenhilde was exhausted, she still caught the ball.

“…..Haahaa…”

But the Angels on the opposing side all marked Elmenhilde immediately as they made plans to take the ball away from her. Seeing Elmenhilde’s weary look, an Angel said

“Have you reached your limit, Vampire? Based on your behaviour, you must be a high-class Vampire, so I suppose it’s already amazing that you were able to last until now in a physically-demanding game.”

“…As a special envoy, I constantly travelled all over various countries…so I have a fair amount of stamina.”

Whilst holding the ball, Elmenhilde extended a hand into her pocket.

“…I also have a special technique of my own, so please allow me to demonstrate it here. Strategist-san, may I use it?”

After asking for permission to use it from Ravel, she also readily agreed.

“…Yes! Please go ahead!”

Elmenhilde removed a small vial from her pocket which was filled with red liquid. It was blood.

“This isn’t as simple as any ordinary blood. This bottle is first.”

Elmenhilde popped the cap of the bottle open with one hand and then gulped it down in one go. Instantly, an enormous pulse radiated from her body, blazing flames emerged behind her, and those flames shaped themselves into wings. It almost seemed as though Elmenhilde herself had caused those flames to manifest. Seeing this, the Angels were shocked.

“—Those flames! Are those the flames of Phoenix!?”

“That’s right, I got this from Strategist-san. The effect has also been strengthened because she’s a virgin.”

Elmenhilde wasn’t done yet as she took out yet another vial.

“One more bottle—”

After gulping it down in an instant — she seemed to enter a trance as her expression changed.

“…Ah, an exquisite taste…! Sweet, mellow, and rich, it’s absolutely addictive…I can’t, my brain is melting from this ultimate deliciousness!”

Suddenly, a boom resounded as the ground around Elmenhilde lifted up into the air, and a red and black aura intertwined around her body. The Angels were all so astonished that their voices were high-pitched as they reacted.

“—Red and black dragon’s aura!”

“It’s the Sekiryuutei’s blood…!”

Indeed, what she just drank was my blood. Hosting the power of the infinite and the dream within it, my blood—. Vampires could trigger a variety of different abilities when they drank blood, and my blood was not something that could be compared to any ordinary stimulant. Although Elmenhilde was from a family of high-class aristocratic Vampires with historical roots, she wasn’t particularly superior in terms of the abilities of normal high-class Vampires. In other words, she was quite ordinary as a pure-blood. However, as a True Ancestor of Carmilla, her ancestry did not betray her—. Only in this was she extraordinary and prominent. That is — so long as she drank someone’s blood, she was able to invoke their abilities. By drinking Ravel’s blood, she was temporarily able to use the flames of immortality. By drinking my blood — she was able to use the Sekiryuutei’s aura to wield the tremendous power of a dragon. It seemed as though all of Elmenhilde’s fatigue disappeared as she released an enormous ball of aura, while the large spear of light that Mirana-san threw from a long distance was easily deflected. The immense pressure made it impossible for any of the reincarnated Angels to get close. —If you’re going to pass, then now’s the time! I gave instructions to Elmenhilde.

“Pass! The free people are—”

“Over here!”

Beside the goal was — Asia, who had already gotten in place a while ago. After Elmenhilde noticed the direction of my gaze, she threw the ball in Asia’s direction. There was no one marking Asia. The focus of all of the reincarnated Angels had been drawn away by me, Xenovia, Irina and Elmenhilde, so they hadn’t noticed that Asia was already right beside the goal. —At this final stage, Asia had found an opening in the opponent’s defence all on her own. Asia caught the ball. Looking at Asia with the call, I cried out

“Asia! Shoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooot!”

Asia prepared to throw. And in that instant, I recalled the words that Asia had spoken to me before.

—…Because I’m always dragging behind, I want to help Ise-san a bit, so all I can do is practice like this.

—… Whether or not I’ve become a good buchou, I always feel uneasy….

—Rias-oneesama had her own style as buchou.

—Ise-san also hasn't followed Rias-oneesama's style of work, you've found your own way to perform your Devil's job.

— My good friends and the person that I like already have such notions, so I too — should set that as my goal.

The ball that Asia threw drew out a beautiful arc in the air as it went into the hoop, and we scored. I — couldn't help but give her a thumbs-up.

<<G-G-G-Gooooooooooooaaaaal!!>>

The announcer excitedly yelled out.

<<Wow! W-Who would have thought! At a time so close to the end like this, the Sekiryuutei team was able to score! These three points are extremely valuable! A comeback victory is becoming extremely promising here! No one knows who'll be standing as the victor in the end, it's still up in the air!">>

Cheers could be heard from the venue. I moved closer to Asia and pat her head.

"Well done, Asia!"

"Yes! I scored!"

After nearly catching up to them in terms of score, the Angels were probably clenching their teeth in regret. The score was now [144 – 146], a difference of only two points! Although there wasn't much time left, there was still a hope of winning! I said to Dulio

"You didn't mark Asia. Don't underestimate us, Trump Card of Heaven. Our team—"

I looked at my own team and declared

"All of them are trump cards."

"…You sure can say that."

Dulio panted as he smiled bitterly.

"…I'm sorry, Dulio."

The Angels who forgot to mark Asia apologised to Dulio, but he shook his head.

"It's fine, it's also my fault. —Asia-chan also went through that tough year. It's my mistake for not marking her."

While we spoke to each other, the announced asked another commentator for their opinion

<<Fafnir-san! Your master, Asia Argento-senshu just scored a goal! With this, we still have no idea about what could happen in the game…>>

The person in question, Fafnir, appeared to be crying.

<<Uuh, as expected of Asia-tan! That is Asia-tan's secret technique, Pantsu Shot! I'm so glad to be alive!>>

<<What! The shot just then had that kind of a name!? 'Pantsu Shot'! What a strange

name…but precisely because of this, the Sekiryuutei team is holding onto the last thread here!>>

That stupid dragon…! He actually gave Asia-chan's emotional shot such a weird name! All of those feelings have been ruined! —But, I no longer had the energy to get angry at that dragon anymore. The time remaining — was roughly two minutes. We had finally arrived at the last moment. And then, the location of the final goal was projected from the device.

"Ise-sama, it's A1."

Ravel reported. I also saw it with the device on my wrist. The very last one had actually appeared in a far corner! Holding the ball, we rushed towards the goal. Chasing closely behind us were Dulio and the others. Dulio controlled the weather to blow violent and heavy gales of wind against us! Our weary bodies were blown off the ground by the wind, but we used what was remaining of our strength to move towards the goal! …I was incredibly tired right now, my body was drenched in sweat, and my stamina was at its limit, I didn't know what else I could do…. Before I even realised it, the edges of my mouth had curled up. For some reason, I was feeling in high spirits despite the situation. Perhaps we would lose like this, or perhaps the ball would be taken from us, but even so, I felt as though I could accept all of this with certainty. It was because none of the people facing me had 'malice', and the enemy that I was fighting against was not 'evil'. No one had to die, and no one was at risk of death. Even though I was clearly so exhausted both physically and mentally, and even though the reincarnated Angels were keeping their eyes on the ball, the closer we got to the goal, the more excited I grew. That's right, under these circumstances, and in this match, 'I was enjoying it'—.

In the very instant that I realised this. In my mind — I could hear a voice that was singing. This singing voice…I seemed to have heard it somewhere before. It wasn't the voice of just a single person either. There were two people, two people were singing. I listened to the singing voices of the two people. —Hmm. …Say, Ddraig. This song reverberating in my chest…what is it? In my mind, some kind of lyrics seemed to appear, a song, I could hear the voices of the two people that sung the song…. That's it, it was the tune that I had heard Ophis and Lilith humming to in the bath.

[Yeah, I can also feel it. This is — from Ophis and Lilith in the bath…. No, it's not just that. Great Red…? Are you there as well?]

Yeah, I see. That is—. This was the song that the two of them had performed—. My current self seemed to understand something. And the man standing in front of me — the Trump Card of Heaven blocked my path.

"Ise-kun, are you having fun?"

"…Seriously, I wonder why. …Running around back and forth like this…even though I'm dead tired…I'm enjoying it!"

I did a partial Dragon Deification of my left arm, and thrust it towards Dulio! Dulio countered back with a huge ball of fire and a giant spear of ice.

"…Hehehe, I see, this might be the first time that I've seen Ise-kun make this kind of expression when fighting. Because we haven't known each other for that long, I

could be wrong about it though…”

I used Solid Impact in combination with my left arm that had undergone Dragon Deification to unleash a red and black aura which crushed those! A loud explosion ricocheted across the entire venue, but I didn’t mind all of that as I continued

“I’m enjoying this! From the bottom of my heart, I’m enjoying this battle and this game!”

“Me too! It’s nice to do this occasionally! A serious battle without a single regard for life or death!”

We both used offensive attacks, and then entered a melee battle! Dulio's twelve feathered wings shone with a golden light, and the golden halo above his head quadrupled! The aura of light enveloping Dulio's body grew thicker, and colossal spears of light appeared everywhere! The spears of light shot towards me, and in order to respond, I used Crimson Blaster and — my left arm that had undergone Dragon Deification released an enormous Dragon Shot to counterattack!

[Boost Boost Boost Boost Boost Boost Boost Boost Boost Boost!!!!!!]

[Fang Blast Booster!!!!]

The massive attacks that were released by me and Dulio collided in the sky above the empty white space, causing an explosion to erupt in all directions! Remnants of red and gold aura scattered above us in the air! But I didn't believe that Dulio would give up with just that!

"Ooooooooooooohhh!"

The instant that the explosion finished, I charged towards Dulio with no hesitation—.

"Haaaaaaaaaaahhh!"

I didn't expect that Dulio would also charge straight towards me from the front! A fist of dragon's aura and a fist coated in light crossed as both of us hit each other in the face, penetrating deeply! My helmet was shattered, and a nosebleed also sprayed out of Dulio's nose, but neither of us retreated and we continued to fight with no hesitation! My armour was broken in various places by his kicks and punches that carried a dense power of light. But, my punches and kicks also struck Dulio's face, abdomen and limbs! To Devils, light was a deadly poison—. Withstanding Dulio's dense light caused unbearable pain to surge throughout my body…. But that was one thing. And this was another! That man who always seemed so casual — was currently facing me head-on in a melee fight! If I didn't respond to this, then that would be unfitting of myself! If I didn't respond to this, then I wouldn't be able to face my comrades or my great rivals! Dulio's handsome face gradually became swollen… but he didn't seem to care as he continued to throw punches at me! His eyes — were burning with fighting spirit! We butt each other with our heads several times! Blood was also streaming down both of our heads. Because we were comrades and friends, this wasn't a death match! —This was simply a fight to the end because we were friends and comrades!

<<Fight! It's a fight—! Between the two [King] players, this is nothing more than a back and forth fist fight! Even though this is all it is, the entire venue is heating up and going into a frenzy here!>>

Hearing the announcer's thrilled shouts, both Dulio and I just focused on aiming at each other's faces with our fists! Our faces were swollen and covered with fresh blood. As the [King] of our respective sides, both of us shouted out to each other

"—It's amazing to fight for the sake of our dream! But, Dulio!"

"Yeah, you're right! But, Hyoudou Issei"

""The person to win will be me!""

While I took Dulio on as an opponent, the ball was passed to Xenovia!

“Xenovia!”

After receiving the ball, Xenovia quickly dashed forward.

“Leave it to me!”

Nero stood in her way!

“—Hmph! Nero! Don’t get in my way! Right now, I am incredibly strong!”

Holding the ball with one hand, Xenovia wielded Durandal in the other hand and it released a powerful holy aura as she slashed it at Nero!

“Excellent! There’ll be worth in defeating you! Come at me!”

Even after taking blows from Durandal’s holy aura, Nero didn’t fall, and seeing his incredibly durable defence, Xenovia was left speechless. Finally, Xenovia made up her mind as she tossed the ball high up into the air, and with her free hand, she drew Excalibur. Holding the two holy swords in a cross stance, Xenovia unleashed a vast aura from her body! And then she also utilised the power of the Sekiryuutei that was embedded within the armour. The jewels of the armour glowed brightly as they transferred their power into the two holy swords! The holy aura that had accumulated in Durandal and Excalibur reached insane levels. Xenovia unleashed the aura wave in a cross formation as she cut down with both holy swords at the same time!

“Cross x Crisis!”

One of Xenovia’s ultimate techniques! She unleashed an extremely dense holy aura straight in front of her! Regardless of whether it was an Ace among reincarnated Angels or even an ultimate-class Devil, taking a direct hit from that would be fatal. Both Xenovia and I tried to move him aside in order to get Nero away from taking a direct hit. However—. It seemed as though Nero was insistent on tanking Xenovia’s ultimate technique!

“I won’t back down!”

Nero was consumed by the aura of Cross x Crisis. The next instant, an enormous explosion occurred and the surrounding terrain was completely obliterated. After the debris that flew through the air finally dissipated a bit, what we saw was — Nero, who stood upright even though his body was covered in injuries…it was the figure of [Captain Angel]. Even if he had been strengthened by his Sacred Gear, there was still a limit to his defences! The combination technique which united the aura of the Sekiryuutei and the two holy swords was Xenovia’s most destructive move! After discharging that technique, Xenovia’s stamina was fully depleted, and so the armour was released, and the aura of the two holy swords also lessened. Xenovia was stunned by Nero’s appearance.

“……! …Even at a time like this, you didn’t retreat and took it head-on…!”

Nero took one step, and then another step as he hobbled forward and raised his fist up. His willpower was absurd—.

“…Hehe…didn’t I say so before, Xenovia? I am [Captain Angel]…the children are watching me. So, I definitely will not falter. …I made up my mind a long time ago…! Whenever the children see me, I will never back down…!”

Nero threw a punch at Xenovia. Nero made use of this opportunity to snatch the ball.

“…Gah!”

“Xenovia-san!”

“Xenovia!”

Asia and Irina both ran towards the fallen Xenovia. Asia began to treat Xenovia’s injuries. But Nero had also reached his limit after knocking Xenovia down, so after passing the ball to his comrades, he also lost consciousness and collapsed.

“Incredible, right? That man is the Ace of the hot-blooded Uriel who relies on his guts.”

Dulio was proud of his own comrade. …Of course, I also understood those feelings. Just as I believed that I couldn’t back down against Dulio, that hero of the Church also held the belief that he had to stand. But even so, the match was not over yet! In order to take back the ball that had fallen into the hands of Dulio’s team, we launched an assault on the Angels. The Angels cleverly passed the ball around while we desperately grasped at any openings. But they wouldn’t reveal any openings so easily! As we became more desperate, I resolutely intended on using another partial transformation with Dragon Deification. Originally, using Dragon Deification on one part of myself was already the limit, but if it’s only for an instant, then it should be possible! I widened my dragon wings and used Dragon Deification on all four of my wings, so for just an instant, I was able to attain a godlike speed! I snatched the ball just as Diethelm-san attempted to pass it to Shinra Kiyotora-san, and then I passed the ball to Rossweisse-san! Rossweisse-san used enhancement magic to heighten her own physical abilities and increase her speed as she rushed towards the goal, but Mirana-san and Griselda-san blocked the way and prevented her from throwing the ball. Rossweisse-san — passed the ball to Bina-shi who approached at high speed. Bina-shi jetted past Mirana-san and Griselda-san, and just as she attempted to shoot the ball into the nearby goal — in that very instant, the sharp sound of the buzzer which marked the conclusion rang out. At the same time, the referee announced

<<Time over! The match is finished! The winner is—>>

The score — was still [144 – 146].

<<—[Trump Card of Heaven]! Dulio Gesualdo’s team is victorious!>>

Along with that announcement, the venue erupted with cheers.

…….

…After knowing that it was over, I fell down on the spot. …I don’t know it if was because of the outcome, or because we knew that the game was over, but there were many players who collapsed. …I looked at the score once more. …But, the score didn’t change. ……I see. …I lost. …Really, we didn’t make it by just a bit. … But, it doesn’t feel bad. It feels so strange even though I clearly lost. It was the first time that I was able to enjoy a battle like this. It wasn’t about life or death, it was just a contest in which we fought with our honour on the line—. Dulio dragged his swollen and tired body to my side.

“……I lost.”

After I said that, Dulio sat beside me.

“Hehe, it was very close. You were able to do that because you guys had so many secret techniques hidden up your sleeve.”

“Are you afraid? Our strategist-sama prepared various tactics to make use of our strengths.”

All of our techniques were basically Ravel’s ideas. But, we had also been amazing for being able to actualise them.

“Ise-kun, the talent of your team is certainly terrifying given that you were able to prepare all that.”

Dulio seemed fearful of us. While the two of us spoke to each other harmoniously as the [King] of our respective sides, Xenovia and Nero, on the other hand, were gasping and arguing with each other.

“…You’re still the same power idiot as always.”

“I don’t want to be told that by the original power idiot.”

But, the two of them smiled as they shook hands.

“Thank you, Nero.”

“Yeah, same here. —Also, call me [Captain Angel].”

On another side, Diethelm-san who was also a healer shook hands with Asia.

“…It is truly a flawless healing ability, Sister Asia.”

“…No, I also feel honoured by the diversity that I have been able to encounter in healing.”

“It seems you didn’t get a chance to summon Fafnir.”

Diethelm-san was right. That dragon sat in the commentary box from beginning to end. Whatever, that dragon should only come out in critical situations where life and death are at risk.

“Although it was passionate and fiery, it was still a peaceful match.”

—Asia said.

“It would be better to discipline that dragon a bit. —Doesn’t he value underwear too much?”

“…H-He isn’t a bad person.”

But you still think he’s a pervert, right? Mirana-san and Irina then gave their respects to each other after the game.

“…Ah, umm…”

Irina reached out to Mirana-san, who seemed slightly fearful.

“A handshake! We’re comrades, so you don’t need to feel so concerned from now on. —Mirana-san, let’s be friends!”

“…Ah, okay…Irina-san…!”

…From the looks of things, we had gained various things in this match, and we had also gained a deeper understanding of each other. …It was still the first time that we had experienced a game like this. It was wonderful that we were able to have feelings like this after the battle. Dulio and I exchanged a handshake. With our faces covered in injuries, we both said to each other

“I won’t lose next time.”

“I won’t lose again next time.”

That’s right, as expected of the Joker! The leader of [DxD]! The announcer cried out

<<The [King] of both teams have shook hands and hugged each other! Audience members, please stand up and give them your applause!>>

Like this, the curtain was closed on the battle between the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team and [Trump Card of Heaven] team which concluded with the [Trump Card of Heaven] team being victorious—.

Part 2

“Ooooooooooooooooooohhhh!”

After the game finished, the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team gathered in the waiting room. What echoed about in the waiting room — was Bova’s wailing. Bova pounded on the walls of the waiting room over and over again.

“Even so! I! I was clearly ordered to become the [Fang of the Sekiryuutei]…! If only I moved around better! If only I fought harder…! I wouldn’t have let My Lord fail…! Even though My Lord is much stronger…!”

I pat Bova as I said

“—Don’t say that Bova. The opponent was strong. That’s how simple it is.”

Bova lay flat on the ground as large tears streamed down his face and he spoke his true feelings.

“…I…if I could fight in a match like the one that you and Sairaorg-dono had…that’s the kind of match that I’d like to have…!”

……I see, so he wanted to make it similar to how it was in my battle against Sairaorg-san. To me, that was also a special battle for me. I felt truly fortunate to be able to look forward to a fight like that.

“Thank you Bova. But a loss in the preliminaries is not a total defeat. We still have the upcoming matches. It’s no big deal, I’ve also been defeated a few times. —We must become stronger before the next match. To catch up to them. I, all of us, we’re always chasing after something.”

Bova looked at me with a smile as I said that, and then he shed manly tears.

“…Ooh, ooooooaaah…”

…Bova, you will become stronger. You’re a dragon with the blood of Tannin-ossan flowing through you, so you’ll definitely become stronger. I looked towards Nakiri.

“…Nakiri, you’ve had to participate in a real battle right off the bat. Thank you for your efforts. If we didn’t have that awesome technique of yours, the difference in our score would have widened and we would have had a more convincing loss.”

“…No, I still lack training. But — you’re the most disappointed aren’t you, senpai?”

Nakiri wiped off his sweat with a towel as he spoke.

“……”

…Seriously, I was left speechless by a single sentence that my junior had said. — But, I won’t let you see that. I won’t allow my junior to see my regretful expression. I — was not only his senior, but also his [King]. If I was going to cry in the tournament, then it would be after I was victorious. Just as Rias did to me, as his senior as well as his [King], I cannot show regret in front of my comrade.

“I am indeed disappointed, but we have learnt a lot in this game. In my view, phrases like ‘there’s no meaning in losing’ or ‘there’s nothing to be gained in losing’, are not true okay? Listen up, Bova, Nakiri.”

That’s right, this is from my experience. Having tried the taste of defeat—. And standing amidst a dilemma—.

“Self-attribution is what makes the people who are defeated more powerful. Because — in order to erase any regrets, you must obtain victory.”

This was an important thing. Only victory and success can blow away the disappointment and regret of the past. To some people, what I’m saying might be taken for granted…but to the people who are filled with deep regret, they will realise that this is the most important thing. After Nakiri finished wiping his face with a towel, he stood in front of me and said

“…I have long since resolved myself in this tournament to struggle through victory and defeat under your command. And now I’ve decided. —I won’t lose next time. Even if the opponent is a god.”

“Yeah, of course!”

That’s right, even if they’re god, all we have to do is defeat them if we encounter them in a match! Nothing more! I originally wanted to say something to Elmenhilde as well…but it was unfortunate that due to her fatigue, she had already fallen asleep on the bench whilst wrapped in a blanket. I said to Ravel and — Bina-shi

“I also have a new possibility for myself, something that I may have grasped in the match just then.”

“…Could it be [Dragon Deification]?”

Ravel asked me, and I answered her directly

“—There is something in that direction, but there’s also something else. [AxA] — I will show you in this tournament. I was finally able to grasp it, and the hint was — in the bath.”

My words caused Ravel and Bina-shi to become speechless…. I can still continue to become stronger, and them — I want to fight against them.

Each impression

After we finished watching the game, I — Kiba Yuuto and all members of the Rias Gremory team fell into silence due to the defeat of Ise-kun's team. Rias-neesan's expression also seemed to show that she was lost for words. Rudiger Rosenkreutz-shi narrowed his eyes and spoke on his own

"I see, Nakiri Ouryuu and Xenovia Quarta's ultimate techniques, Bova Tannin and Shidou Irina's growth, and the strengthening of the Karnstein family's daughter as well as Asia Argento who almost lacked defence—"

Rudiger-shi smiled in a self-critical manner.

"For someone slightly clever like me, it was a very effective move. Hyoudou Issei has truly met a very good group of friends."

Rias-neesan shook her head.

"No, your tactics have caused Ise and the others to be defeated. …Rudiger Rosenkreutz-sama, your ability has made me realise that."

Rias-neesan extended her hand out.

"Well, to each their own. He is truly a wonderful companion. He is sure to become a strong foundation for the future of the Gremory House."

Rudiger-shi shook Rias-neesan's hand as he spoke.

"Ise has stated that you are one of his goals. I'm sure this will leave a deep impression in his mind."

After Rudiger-shi heard that, he answered with

"It is an honour."

And then stood up. As he prepared to leave, he looked at me and asked

"I'll ask again, not to Princess Rias, but to the holy-demonic sword boy there. After watching that game, what are your thoughts?"

—Hmm. …My impression of the match. He was asking about what I felt about that game.

"…Fighting, in a Rating Game, it's a collision of your own and your opponent's 'heart'…that's all I can say, and it would be nice if it was that simple."

Rudiger-shi looked back towards the large display, and shown on that was the image of Ravel-san's face which appeared to maintain a strong resolve as she exited the venue.

"If you told Ravel Phoenix that she lost simply because her 'heart' was lacking, I wonder if that would be enough to console her…. That game just now, it would be so easy if you had to sum it up just in terms of 'heart'."

His eyes seemed to be filled with a complex emotion that couldn't be expressed in words—. Rias-neesan said

"I hope that we'll be able to accept your teachings next time in another place outside of the tournament. Ise certainly has his own reasons for admiring you."

After Rudiger-shi finished his preparations to leave, he gave a slight smile.

"You flatter me too much, Princess Rias. —I, all I want to do is to make Dulio Gesualdo win because my son believed in him."

After saying that, Rudiger-shi walked towards the doorway. Before he stepped through the door, he looked back and said just one last thing.

"All members of the Gremory team, if we meet on the tournament stage, then I shall give you much guidance then. Well then, I shall excuse myself."

…Hailed as the [Upsetting Sorcerer], he didn't speak much about his personal circumstances. However, his team had demonstrated that outcome. But, that outcome — for us in the future, as well as for Ise-kun and the others in the future, it was a tremendous gain.

Junior's preparation

After the game ended, the members of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] all gathered in the waiting room as they reflected on the tournament and discussed issues for the future. After that, everyone went to take a break. After coming out from the waiting room and heading over to the vending machine in the corridor to buy a drink (it was in fact to be alone), Nakiri Ouryuu saw the silhouette of a certain person. On the other side of the corridor was — a girl in her teens with beautiful and sleek long silver hair. The girl's face was like a work of art. It was neat and incredibly pretty. It was almost as if her two deep red pupils were able to illuminate an abyss as they reflected Nakiri Ouryuu within them. Her face was almost like an artwork, but it couldn't hold her smile.

"Good work, Ouryuu."

"Millarca, aren't you worried about coming out during the day? —Ah right, this is the Underworld."

The girl before his eyes was a pure-blooded Vampire — Millarca Vordenburg. She didn't have to worry about sunlight because she was in the Underworld, and that was why she didn't have to wear as many layers of clothing as before.

"Mmm, the Underworld sure is a nice place. I don't have to wear a scarf or sunglasses."

Her art-like face spoke with an unimaginably cute voice. After Nakiri Ouryuu pressed a button on the vending machine to purchase his sports drink, he walked down the corridor together with Millarca.

"—Well, is there anything you want to say?"

Millarca wanted to ask Nakiri Ouryuu about his feelings after the match.

"Yeah, to reflect a bit—"

Just as he was about to speak, somewhere in the depths of the corridor up ahead, a voice was heard. It was the voice of a crying woman. The two of them hid around the corner, with Nakiri Ouryuu on top and Millarca below as they quietly poked their heads out to take a look. In front of them were — Hyoudou Issei and Ravel Phoenix. Ravel Phoenix…tears endlessly overflowed from her eyes, and it looked like she had already been crying for a long time.

(…*sob* *hick*, Ise-sama…I…even though I was there…)

Hyoudou Issei gently embraced her, and he pat her head as he said

(If I didn't have Ravel, the match would've been much worse. We still have opportunities. I, we'll become stronger together.)

Ravel Phoenix buried her head into Hyoudou Issei's chest.

(…Yes.)

After answering with that, she continued to whimper against Hyoudou Issei's chest. …After losing, the princess-sama who was the same age as him had appeared rather strong-hearted whilst in the waiting room. Regardless of whether it was in her ordinary school life, or as the Sekiryuutei's manager, she never showed any weakness. She always guided the members of the team as well as the [King] that she adored. Nakiri Ouryuu felt that it would be insensitive to continue spying on them, so he pulled on Millarca's hand to leave.

"…"

Seeing the silent Nakiri Ouryuu, Millarca said

"…In front of her comrades, she won't show any regret, Ravel-san that is."

"…Hyoudou-senpai, he also treasures Phoenix very much."

Precisely because of that, he took Ravel Phoenix to a place away from everyone else so that he could listen to her heartfelt emotions. He must have noticed that his own manager was forcing herself.

—He is a good person. He looks after his own peerage well.

Nakiri Ouryuu thought of the senior that he respected and revealed a smile.

"—He is truly worthy of respect, that senpai. He really inspires me as someone who similarly hosts a dragon."

"Ooh — I see! By the way, did you know?"

Millarca said

"—Most of the men who meet the Sekiryuutei become fascinated with him."

"That's naturally because he's such an amazing person."

"Ah, I see!"

Through this game, Nakiri Ouryuu recognised his own strengths, as well as his own weaknesses and deficiencies—.

—Through this tournament, I can become stronger. I can allow the 'dragon' within me to become stronger! More than anything, as a warrior who is the host of a 'dragon', I can become a part of Hyoudou Issei's strength. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. As a younger male, I want to catch up to him—.

Nakiri Ouryuu said to Millarca

"I have to start over again by running laps. If I don't, then I won't have the right to face Hyoudou-senpai, Xenovia-kaichou or Phoenix."

"You look happy."

Indeed, that's because the experience of this tournament is far more precious than anything else—.

Interview

After the game concluded, journalists from every faction ambushed and encircled Rudiger Rosenkreutz who had just emerged from the entrance for related personnel. The journalists vied for the supervisor's answers. After Rudiger Rosenkreutz finished giving simple greetings, he said

"A defeat is generally divided into two types. There's the type of defeat in which people realise the strength of their opponents and hope not to encounter them again out of fear. The other type is one where people walk away with a sense of accomplishment in order to be victorious the next time. Under my command, I originally wanted to give the Sekiryuutei and the others the former. —But in the end, they obtained the latter. —If there is ever another encounter, they will have become powerful opponents far stronger than they were today."

When evaluating other teams, Rudiger Rosenkreutz was always rather critical and blunt, so it was highly unusual for him to praise others to such an extent, and this caused all of the journalists to be surprised. A particular journalist asked

"I have heard that good players can grow not just their own team, but also their opponent's team in a game. Supervisor Rosenkreutz, could it be possible that the Angels, as well as the Sekiryuutei team have been able to learn something in this game?"

Upon hearing the journalist's question, Rudiger smiled happily.

"Even you're giving me too much credit. But, that's right…it looks like some promising youths have the possibility to cause a Giant Killing ' ' ' , and this is something that fans around the world wish to see. Today's match was nothing more than a prelude, and it's an honour for me to be a part of it."

At that time, Rudiger Rosenkreutz's eyes looked into the distance as he said

"…The Champion Diehauser Belial often speaks of growing teams, unexpectedly strong teams, and teams filled with youth…regardless of whether it's my team or the Sekiryuutei's team, all of that applies to both of them."

Rudiger Rosenkreutz closed his eyes as if he was talking to someone in his mind.

"He isn't just watching this game, but the whole tournament…no, even if he can only hear rumours…. That is just my wishful thinking. He desires a Giant Killing more than anyone else—"

Rudiger left those words behind and left the venue.

—Giant Killing.

Perhaps the man regarded as a hero among reincarnated Devils foresaw a future trend in the game. After this, Giant Killings would continue to be demonstrated in the tournament—.

Notes

1. Kanji was ‘upset’.

Next Life...

And so, The Seating Battle Begins!

Part I

The season for our uniforms to change had come around again, and the Ball Game Tournament had also begun.

“Go! Go!”

“There! Go over there!”

The gymnasium and field were filled with cheers and cries of support. All students participated in inter-class competitions or inter-club competitions as they immersed themselves in the atmosphere of a festival. The category for this year’s club tournament was — surprisingly, basketball! It was a surprise that the practice that we had made for this sport could be put into play like this! Our new Occult Research Club participated in the tournament with a line-up that included me, Kiba, Koneko-chan, Irina, and Asia; we defeated various other clubs one after the other. After all, there was a clear difference between the physical abilities of humans and Devils… but this was all for the sake of defeating them!

“Our goal is to come in first place! Also, we must defeat the Student Council!”

As the club buchou, Asia was filled with enthusiasm to defeat the Student Council! We also responded to her with

[Yeeaah!]

And we followed the lead of Asia-buchou! The Occult Research Club effortlessly won match after match, and we finally arrived at the finals — together with those who had cut their way through the draw like us, the new Student Council that was led by Xenovia. In the centre of the gymnasium, the Occult Research Club and Student Council faced each other in basketball uniforms.

“Ise, win!”

“Asia-chan, do your best!”

Matsuda and Motohama cheered us on!

“Kiba-kyun!!!”

“Kiba-kyun-senpaiii!!!”

The cheers for Kiba were mostly the excited cries of various female students. …So they really do call him ‘Kiba-kyun-senpai’ huh….

“Let’s go, Asia, Xenovia!”

Kiryuu was supporting both teams. The two leaders — Asia-buchou and Xenovia-kaichou stared at each other.

“Xenovia-san, I won’t lose to you.”

“Asia, that’s exactly what I wanted to say, because I’ve got no plans to lose to you!”

Their line-up was composed of Xenovia, Saji, Nakiri, Meguri-san, and Nimura-san. They were all members who were not to be underestimated, and Saji stood in front of me as he said

“Since we’re competing, I won’t lose to you. We can treat this as a prelude to the upcoming game.”

“Me neither, Saji.”

Nakiri apologised to me while saying something along the lines of

“This is this, and that is that.”

It’s fine, this is an inter-club competition so it can’t be helped. Before we even realised, the gymnasium had been filled with students who had come to join the crowd.

“Everyone, regardless of whether it’s a win or a loss, don’t leave behind any regrets!”

Even Rossweisse-san had come over. After the referee allowed us to bow and salute each other, all players dispersed towards their respective positions, and the whistle to mark the beginning sounded out. As soon as we began, no Devils’, Angels’ or any other kinds of abilities were used, and we competed solely with the innate ability of our bodies. Kiba quickly dribbled as he shifted into offense, but Nakiri marked and chased after him with a speed that didn’t lose to Kiba’s, and Xenovia then snatched the ball that was supposed to have been passed to Irina. When the ball eventually made its way to my hands and just as I was about to shoot, Saji said

“As if I’d let you!”

As he leapt up to block me! As soon as either side scored, the other side would immediately catch up. The match continued in a close fashion, and the score was always comparable. Time was running out, and Koneko-chan made a good pass to Asia. —There was no one marking her! It was the same as that time. If it’s Asia, then she can definitely do it—. But, as if she had been expecting this, Xenovia quickly dashed forward and stood in front of Asia! Asia got in position to shoot, and Xenovia moved into a firm defensive position in preparation to steal the ball. And then, just as she was about to shoot — Asia changed her momentum as she turned around to dribble. —It was a feint! Asia brushed past Xenovia! As she approached the hoop, Asia jumped up to throw the ball—. Xenovia was still stunned by Asia’s feint from before, but she immediately reacted and caught up—.

“I won’t let you score, Asia!!”

“—No, we will win!”

In that instant, the ball was released from Asia’s hands—.

“Aaah, in the end, we both won with the same number of points.”

I held the certificate that we had received for winning the inter-club competition as I walked with Asia on our way back home. At the time, because the score was even and neither side would back down even after an extended match, it became a

penalty shootout. But, a winner had still not been decided after that, and because there was insufficient time, the result was a ‘double win due to equal score’. It might have been possible to end it with rock-paper-scissors, but we had already competed so hard in our attempt to determine a victor that it was likely pointless. The students who were spectating didn’t have any complaints either, they were highly enthusiastic and they seemed to really enjoy our match. Because Asia and I had a few errands to run, we returned home after our club activities. Asia said

“In this case, I’ll have some good news to tell Rias-oneesama.”

Although we had the same score, we were still winners. Rias would probably be delighted by it. But the resilience of Xenovia and the others was truly terrifying. Though of course, we didn’t give up either. Asia’s only desire until the very end was to obtain victory. As her club member, I couldn’t help but follow her lead. Like this, we continued to exchange our thoughts on the inter-club competition. When we walked through the park, we suddenly heard the sound of a young boy crying. As we walked over to take a look, we saw that it was a young boy who had fallen over on the ground, and he hugged his wounded knee as he cried. Asia quickly ran over to take a look at the boy’s knee.

“Are you okay? Boys shouldn’t cry with a minor injury like this okay?”

—Hmm. Those words and this scene reminded me of that time. Indeed, a year ago, Asia and I had met under similar circumstances. Back then, Asia had also rushed over because a child had gotten injured. And after saying the same words, she used her Sacred Gear to heal the child’s wound. This time as well, Asia used the power of her Sacred Gear to heal the young boy’s injured knee.

“Okay, it’s all gone now. You don’t have to worry anymore.”

Although the young boy was in disbelief that the pain had disappeared, he quickly bowed to show his appreciation.

“Thank you, onee-chan!”

After saying that, the boy ran off.

“Thank you, onee-chan huh.”

I repeated that as I recalled what Asia was like back then and laughed out loud.

“Ufufu, I can clearly understand Japanese now.”

Indeed, you’re right. And then, Asia stood in front of me and said

“—Encountering Ise-san and everyone else is the most precious gift that God-sama has given to me.”

—.

…….

…When we first met, Asia solemnly spoke about the circumstances surrounding her ability. She had already experienced many hardships up until that point. And since then, she obviously experienced an even more difficult year than before…the smile that Asia showed was more brilliant, and more beautiful than that time. And in that

instant, I made up my mind. Haven't I already waited for a long time? Can't I tell her already? I gently held Asia's shoulders as I said

"What I'm about to say next is something that I had already decided to tell you before…"

I took a pause. Can I really? Can I make Asia happy? That was what I had constantly been pondering over…. But, I made an oath. I was going to move forward together with Asia. To spend my life with her as a Devil with an almost-eternal life—. As I am right now, I definitely can—. After coming to this point, I finally had confidence. Even a little arrogance. A high-class Devil — I had already become a [King]. I had also allowed Asia to become one of my servants. Right now, I was definitely capable of allowing Asia Argento to live a happy life! So I should say it, I should tell her. I — have to tell Asia my own feelings! I faced Asia and resolutely said

"—Asia, will you stay by my side in the future? I will definitely make you happy."

This was the proposal — that came from me. I want Asia…to stay by my side. I want to marry her! I want to be together with her always, for my entire life! After listening to my proposal, Asia began to let out large teardrops from her eyes. The expression on her face was filled with joy!

"……Yes, please look after me from now on!"

Asia nodded as she accepted my proposal! —Yahoo! Asia said yes! I embraced Asia and loudly shouted out!

"Let's spend our lifetime togetheeeeeeeeeeeeeeer!"

"Yes! Let's be together forever!"

I held Asia in my arms even tighter as I savoured the moment of happiness! Ah, my Asia-chan! My future bride! I will definitely make you happy! With such a nice atmosphere going between us, we moved our faces closer together, and we were just about to kiss. And then they sprang out from the shadows.

"Did you hear that, Irina!?"

"Yeah, I heard it, Xenovia!"

With emotional tears streaming down their faces, Xenovia and Irina made their appearance.

“Asia has finally become Ise’s future bride as well!”

“The three of us will be good brides!”

They displayed womanly tears which were somehow able to rival the intensity of manly tears!

“Irina, Xenovia!? Y-You guys were watching!?”

Hearing me ask that, Irina replied

“We just happened to see you two. And then we hid so that we could spy on you two. Sorry about that.”

We were seen! Seriously, I’m so embarrassed! Irina seemed touched, but she then spoke with a regretful tone

“But, this is truly the best proposal…! I feel regret…! I shouldn’t have followed Xenovia to propose as well! It would’ve been better if I had said that in a more romantic situation! To a girl, this is a once in a lifetime event!”

No one told you to follow Xenovia’s lead to say it as well! If I didn’t give a good response back then, I would’ve made a fool of myself! Xenovia pulled Asia away from my hands as she hugged her.

“Very good! Asia! Anyway, the three of us have now become Ise’s brides!”

Irina also dashed over, and the three of them formed a circle.

“Mmhmm! It sure is the best when the three of us are together!”

“Y-Yes! From now on, I will also continue to work hard as a member of the Hyoudou family!”

The three people who had formed a circle all turned around, and all three of them looked at me

“”””That’s okay, right?”””

—Geez, the three of you really get along so well!

“Ah—, I get it! Regardless of whether it’s Asia, Xenovia or Irina, I’LL MAKE ALL OF YOU HAPPY!”

Rias, Akeno-san, Asia, Xenovia, Irina! Since I’ve already confessed to all of you, I’ll be sure to make all of you happy! Hey, Azazel-sensei! I’ll make everyone happy! Because the only person who can achieve this is the current Sekiryuutei!

Part 2

Although the inter-club competition had ended, the Tournament still continued—. After this, Sairaorg-san's team and Cao Cao's team faced off, while we and the Sitri team also battled — I had a rematch with Saji. This was how the first trimester of our third year passed. The preliminaries were reaching the tail-end, and all teams engaged in fiery battles in order to make it into the top sixteen. Tonight, the new match-ups would be announced, so we of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team (Bina-shi was absent) all gathered in front of a television. Game combinations were announced one after the other — the match dates were already set, and ours were amidst them. We had also faced various teams that had a significant reputation…but we had managed to successfully squeeze ourselves into the final stages of the Tournament's preliminaries. Just as these naïve thoughts floated across my mind, the next match-up blew all of that away. As those two names appeared on the television, the entire venue appeared to heat up.

[Rias Gremory] team VS [Hakuryuukou of the Morning Star] Vali Lucifer team

—What! …So it's finally come, Rias…and Vali are fighting! Even Xenovia spoke up when she saw this.

"This! What kind of pairing is this!? Master Rias is actually going up against Vali Lucifer!"

The expression on Rossweisse-san's face was also complex.

"Normally speaking, Vali Lucifer's team would have an advantage…but because Crom Cruach is present, it's difficult to predict how things will turn out. Moreover, I have heard that Rias-san is also negotiating with a new candidate…"

A new candidate? Who is Rias planning to add to her team? It's already pretty scary that she's got Crom Cruach….

"Rias-sama is still negotiating that right now…. Although we live under the same roof, we're still on opposing teams, so information like that can't be freely exchanged."

—Ravel said. I was also able to understand Rias' reasons for hiding it, because there would be no point participating in the Tournament if we knew everything about each other's candidates. It's just that—.

"Neither Rias nor Vali can afford to underestimate each other…"

I gulped as I said that. …It seemed as though it would be an unimaginable game. And then, the next game combination was displayed on the television. Irina cried out in surprise!

"…Our team seems to have encountered an unbelievable group!?"

[Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] Hyoudou Issei team VS [Pleasure of the Kings] Typhon, Apollon, Vidar alliance team

…I was lost for words. We had actually encountered that Vidar-san and Apollon-san's team!

“…We have god-class beings as our opponents!”

“Moreover, they’re one of the candidates that are predicted to win the Tournament!”

The expression on Ravel’s face clouded. The two next-generation chief gods as well as the legendary King of Monsters…! Rossweisse-san said in astonishment.

“The King of Monsters Typhon, the current chief god of Olympus Apollon…as well as the current chief god of Asgard Vidar-sama…!”

Because she had come from the Norse mythology herself, she inevitably had some complex emotions about fighting against Vidar-san. Nakiri couldn’t help but laugh bitterly as well

“Hahaha, colour me impressed.”

—He hit his hand against his forehead. Ravel spoke to me with determination

“…Ise-sama, since we’re aiming for victory, they are one of the opponents that we are destined to meet. It’s just a matter of time.”

“Yeah, this is the most crucial match for our team.”

…Since we were aiming for victory, it was inevitable that we would have to fight against god-class beings. Up until now, we never had anything that could be considered good luck, but this should be normal. That’s right, this was exactly the kind of abnormal Tournament that allowed us to fight against god-class beings. Just as all of my team members felt more and more pressure, we heard a knock at the door. —Mum opened the door and came in.

“Huh, mum? Is something the matter?”

“Ise, you have a guest. …I believe the guest is a Devil. They have horns on their head.”

…Horns? We all looked at each other and then went downstairs. Standing there was a beautiful woman with bright pink hair and horns on her head, Roygun Belphegor-san! W-Why is Roygun-san at my house!? Although she saw that all of us were astonished and speechless, Roygun-san didn’t seem to mind as she greeted us.

“My deepest apologies for visiting so late at night. How are you, Sekiryuutei?”

“Roygun-san! W-What are you doing here?”

I spoke without much thought, but Roygun-san stepped out onto the porch and wordlessly snapped her fingers. The next instant, several magic circles appeared in the courtyard of my house, and several people draped in hoods and cloaks appeared.

“W-What is this…!?”

All of us became wary as I asked her that

“My peerage.”

Roygun-san swiftly answered me. …R-Roygun-san’s peerage huh. But why have they gathered at my house? Seeing my doubtful expression, Roygun-san spoke with

a serious look

“This is a demonstration of our determination.”

In front of me, Roygun-san — kneeled down!? Quickly after that, all of her peerage members also kneeled down!

“I, Roygun Belphegor and my peerage have come forward in the hopes of joining under the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] Hyoudou Issei-sama’s command. At the same time, we implore you to allow us to join the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team —”

—What!? W-W-W-What is happening!? This is truly beyond all imagination! Roygun-san brought her peerage here, and not only does she want to become my subordinate, but she also wants to join my team! She’s the former second ranker of the Rating Games, so why has such an amazing person come over to me with no hesitation, what is going on…! I was already far too shocked to speak. Beside me, Ravel supressed her disbelief and feigned calmness as she asked Roygun-san

“Could I please know the reason—. Although you once used the [King] piece, aside from the abnormal Diehauser-sama, you are the strongest player in the Rating Games, Roygun-sama. Please allow me to hear the reason why you wish to join Ise-sama’s team.”

Roygun-san narrowed her eyes and slowly replied

“…To put it simply, I wish to stand upon the stage of the Rating Games once more. Although I had past misconduct, if you take the Rating Games away from me, then I…have nothing left. I am a Devil who lives only for the sake of that competition. … But, if I continue the way I am, I cannot return to the Games. …I’m sorry for saying all this because of my own selfishness, but for someone like you who has such reverence and faith in the Underworld, I want to lend you a helping hand.”

Roygun-san knelt down in front of me again, and earnestly pleaded.

“Hyoudou Issei-sama, in exchange, I will dedicate all of myself to you. Even if I have lost the abilities of the [King] piece, the techniques of many good players still remain with me — therefore, can you please consider this seriously?”

…….

…The scene before my eyes was too sudden, and I couldn’t utter a word. …At that time, I recalled what Ravel had said to my last spring.

—Even if it doesn’t feel like reality, there will be many kinds of people who appear before your eyes, Ise-sama.

—You may feel the sense of being a high-class Devil from such situations.

—You will most likely become the most anticipated High-class Devil rookie in the whole Underworld.

…Bova had appeared, Nakiri had also sought me out, and Bina-shi came on her own…on top of that, the strongest female player of the Rating Games had also come before me…! …To be honest, the feeling was incredibly unreal. Even the person who

said that to me in the past, Ravel, also seemed too shocked to reply because of Roygun-san's response. The former second ranker of the Rating Games had made an unexpected appearance, and her wish made us feel both astonished and troubled. The heat of this final summer break of my high school life seemed like it would far exceed last year's—. Indeed, a feast never cooled down, it would only continue to grow more lively.

Singularity

On the other hand, at that time—.

Rias Gremory visited a certain remote farm somewhere in Italy. On the farm — working in the grape field was a man around two metres tall with a sturdy body who was dressed in work clothes. Despite the young appearance of his body, he was actually an eighty-seven-year-old man. The old man — after Vasco Strada noticed Rias Gremory, a smile emerged on his face.

“Good day, Your Eminence Vasco Strada.”

“Well well…if it isn’t the Gremory Princess. Have you been well lately?”

Strada welcomed Rias into his secluded home, and they began a tea party on the balcony. After the two of them sat down, Strada raised the teapot so that he could pour a cup of black tea for Rias. Although Strada had poured a cup for Rias, Rias cut straight to the point of what she was after.

“I didn’t come here to drink tea today.”

Strada placed his hand on the table as he showed a gentle smile.

“Oh.”

Rias asked directly

“—Have you heard of the Rating Game World Tournament, Your Eminence?”

Strada lifted his head as he looked up at the sky.

“Fufufu, I don’t suppose you have any idea about the number of guests I’ve already had, Princess…”

“It seems as though you declined all of those offers, Your Eminence. Considering your own skills, I’m sure you can imagine the temptations.”

Strada’s wish was to spend his remaining day’s peacefully here as a human. This was something that Rias also knew. So Strada in turn asked Rias

“Since you especially came all the way here despite knowing this old man’s reasons…I presume that you have some way to persuade this me? I’m not as young as the Sekiryuutei boy. This old man has devoted his entire life to God, and he also understands that his mission is over. The Evil Dragon War was my final battle.”

Perhaps that was what Strada believed. But Rias thought

Is this what His Eminence truly thinks? Does he truly not have any nostalgia? —Can the Evil Dragon War truly be regarded as the final battle of his life?

He had gone through the battle of the Church warriors, a fight against Arthur Pendragon, and the Evil Dragon War that had occurred not too long ago. Rias had already become quite deeply fascinated by Vasco Strada’s ‘sword’. Rias said

“—In the prime of Your Eminence, you were able to totally defeat Fallen Angel cadres, and also ultimate-class Devils. Even the Maous were fearful of your sword.”

Legends about Vasco Strada could always be heard of in the Underworld and he was referred with various names

[The Church’s Device of Violence]...

[The Violence of Heaven]...

[The Vatican’s Evil Killer]...

[Mr. Durandal]...

And a few even had called him

[The True Devil]

The Devils who had survived despite seeing the appearance of him in battle all felt immense fear at the time, and they trembled as they said this

—I never want to see that man again.

The Devils felt fear from the bottom of their hearts when they saw the young Vasco Strada. The Devils called him a ‘Devil’. Indeed, they called him a ‘Devil’—. But, that ‘Devil’ was about to become a piece of history. He wanted his life to end here. He hoped for it to end this way. Rias earnestly thought

—Is this not too pitiful?

Strada sipped the cup of black tea as he said

“You wish to hear the heroic tales of battle of my younger days huh…but that doesn’t seem to be the case. Well, Princess. The Maou’s little sister. What do you want to ask me? What do you want to say to me?”

Rias — solemnly said

“—My [Knight] Kiba Yuuto, the present wielder of Durandal Xenovia, the wielder of Hauteclere Irina, Cao Cao who is regarded as a peerless genius, and the wielder of the Holy King Sword Collbrande Arthur Pendragon. After you became an executive of the Vatican, many talented people have appeared—. When Your Eminence was young, you regarded battle more highly than anything else, I’m sure this is what Vasco Strada believes.”

Rias stood up, and she grew more passionate the more she spoke

“—As a warrior, and as a swordsman, you should do your utmost to fight against them!”

Rias’ passion-filled words poured out, and even the volume of her voice rose. After Strada heard Rias’ speech, he fell into silence. He calmly looked up at the sky. Rias quietly waited for his answer. Strada picked up his straw hat from the table and put it on, and only spoke after covering the top half of his face.

“…Princess of the Devils. What I’m about to say may be taboo for a believer of the Church. But, please regard them as the words that are left deep in the heart of a

former swordsman as you listen to them.”

After a brief pause, Strada, the man known as the [Violence of Heaven], said

“—If I was born sixty years, no, fifty years later, then I would be able to enjoy this era in which so many strong people have gathered. …It would be a lie to say that I don’t have any regrets. When I crossed blades with Arthur Pendragon — I wanted to cut him down because my heart was filled with a passion that swirled, and it could have been ignited if only I had been born even just thirty years later.”

After finally hearing his true words, Rias relaxed as she whispered the temptations of a Devil to Strada.

“If I said that I could rejuvenate Your Emimence’s youth, what would you do? Of course, rather than using a Devil’s method, it would be like the work of God—”

These words caused Strada to stare at Rias from under the rim of his hat. Rias continued

“—With the power of the [Sephiroth Graal] and the Demon God Balor, along with senjutsu, it should be possible to temporarily return you to your youth, right? This isn’t a Devil’s method. It’s simply an application of the Sacred Gear System created by the God of the Bible and the power of a sage.”

This was the new possibility that Rias had explored with her team members up until now. It was also a strong statement to convince Strada. Seeing a ray of hope, Rias came here for the final piece of the puzzle. Rias placed her hand on the table and created a small transportation magic circle, from which an object emerged. It was a long and slim briefcase. Rias unlocked it and allowed Strada to view the contents within. Inside — there were two long swords. One of them was a sword with a crimson blade. The other one was a sword with a blue blade which seemed to radiate an aggressive holy aura—. Rias pointed to the holy sword which released a holy aura.

“This is the newest holy sword that the Church has created — Durandal II. Your Emimence, it’s an evolution of the Durandal that you wielded before. …There are many people in the Church who wish to see you in your prime. This sword could be described as a masterpiece that was dedicated to you. —The believers wish to see the sword skills of yours that were called a living miracle.”

As he looked at the new Durandal, Strada was like a father who had reunited with his son. To him, that was the kind of existence that Durandal was. The true Durandal was currently in the hands of his successor (Xenovia). However, the Durandal before his eyes — was a masterpiece that the young ones at the Church had forged for him —. As his hand moved towards the blade, he was able to feel its aura. With just that, he was able to feel the sheer extent of the feelings that had gone into the sword. He was definitely able to understand. Strada looked up at the sky. With shame and excitement, the voice that he squeezed out of his mouth was mixed with regret and excitement.

“……Oh, O Lord. I never imagined that the Devil’s whispers would be so sweet…. As expected of the Maou Lucifer’s younger sister…. This old man has never heard such terrifyingly persuasive words!”

Rias didn't retreat. She absolutely wouldn't retreat like this. In her mind, a particular scene resurfaced.

Not long after the game between Ise's team and the reincarnated Angel's team concluded, Rias went to seek out a certain person. In a corridor for relevant personnel in the stadium, Rias and that person — Bina Lessthan met. Rias already knew her true identity. Because her mask had broken in the midst of the game, Rias was able to see the face that was beneath the mask. That face — was very similar to her younger appearance. —No, it was her.

[…Grayfia-oneesama.]

Bina Lessthan — Grayfia Lucifugus took off her dragon-like mask and revealed her face before Rias. Although she appeared to be a teenage girl who was roughly the same age as her…that face was identical to the face of her dear sister-in-law's face in the past. Her sister-in-law, Grayfia Lucifugus had used magic to change her appearance back to how she once looked when she was a teenager, and became the [Queen] of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team by taking up the name of Bina Lessthan. Grayfia put the mask back on, and then said to Rias

[…Rias, I won't say too much. But, please remember one thing.]

Grayfia stepped forward and stood beside Rias to so that she could speak at a close distance

[—I will make Hyoudou Issei-kun a Maou.]

Upon hearing her sister-in-law's confession, she narrowed her eyes and frowned.

[…I don't believe that this is Ise's own intention, right?]

[That's right, these are my own intentions. However, I believe that this will eventually be the intention of the entire Underworld. I will support him as his [Queen].]

Why did she have such thoughts, and why did she have such feelings? All Rias knew was that — after her sister-in-law lost her brother Sirzechs, a picture had already been drawn in her mind. Moreover, the person who could make it a reality — was Ise. Even if she tried to persuade her sister-in-law, she would not listen; that was something that Rias knew more clearly than anyone else. After all, she had taken care of her ever since she was young—. She had always admired her ever since that time—. Hence, Rias made up her mind from that point onwards. —She had come to ascertain her true feelings right after the game. Rias' eyes were filled with determination as she declared to Grayfia

[…So long as I fight, even if my opponent is onee-sama, and even if my opponent is Ise, I will win.]

Grayfia, her sister-in-law, and Bina Lessthan revealed a fearless smile as she accepted the declaration of war from her younger sister-in-law.

[Good. This is what I expect from my sister-in-law.]

Indeed, Rias made a declaration of war against her precious sister-in-law. She looked forward to having a battle against the person that she loved. Hence, Rias sought a power which was capable to overthrowing her mighty lover and her sister-

in-law—. If that power could help liberate the strength that Rias and the others had even further, then it would give them more strength than ever.

Vasco Strada seemed to make a final confirmation as he dryly asked Rias

“I may swing his sword down on your future husband-dono Princess, is even that alright? Whatever my blade meets — without exception, it will be cut. Even if he hosts the power of infinity, as long as I return to how I was in those days, I will be able to cut it without a problem. —No, it will be cut.”

Rias didn’t hesitate to answer directly

“The man who is to become my husband must then overcome this difficulty.”

This one line marked the conclusion. Strada stood up, and the soft smile that was on his face vanished and immediately turned into a warrior’s face.

“……A wonderful answer…! From here on, Vasco Strada shall stand up before you as a hurdle for you husband-dono’s groom training!”

“Can we agree that this negotiation is successful then?”

On this day, the strongest swordsman in the history of the Vatican announced his intention to participate in the Rating Game World Tournament. After the negotiation, both Rias and Strada sighed. Strada was concerned about the other sword that was in the briefcase, so he asked about the crimson-bladed sword.

“Speaking of which, what about this weapon? It appears to be a sword.”

Rias replied in a slightly shy manner.

“After I became engaged to Ise, Heaven gifted me a sword with a crimson blade as a blessing. It has already been adjusted so that Devils can use it. —But, neither Ise nor I will master it… So, perhaps our future children could use it?”

“I see, that’s not a bad idea. If I can live to that age, please allow me to bless your future children.”

“There’ll be a lot of trouble if Your Eminence blesses them. After all, we’re Devils.”

“That’s true.”

Just as the two of them were chatting like that—. Rias’ mobile phone received a message. As she took it out to check, what appeared was — a shocking piece of news that Akeno had sent over.

“…This is!”

“What’s wrong?”

In response to Strada’s question, Rias smiled wryly.

“……Fufufu, from the looks of things, it won’t be that easy for me to get into the finals of the Tournament. Your Eminence, I have received some news.”

Rias told Vasco Strada directly without any intentions of hiding anything.

“—The Champion may return.”

The message that Rias had received was that ‘The Champion Diehauser Belial has been temporarily released’.

“—Hmm. …This is truly, quite excellent.”

Her new team member simply revealed a bold smile to indicate his welcoming of it. The Tournament was still full of chaos and enthusiasm—.

The Return of the King

Diehauser Belial awoke quietly in a room made for one person. The place where he was currently staying was a prison of the Underworld that detained political prisoners. After he awoke in the single room, he sighed deeply. —He had a dream in which he recalled memories from his childhood. The Belial House could be considered to be among the poor aristocracy. He grew up in a house that was located in depths of a small mountain. Although his father was a high-class Devil with average ability, his ancestors from the previous few generations were unknown people, and in the previous War of the Three Factions as well as the Civil War of the old government, they had constantly made various errors, so the strength of the Belial House continued to decline, and the family's authority also fell significantly. During the two generations spanning his grandfather's and his father's time, when Diehauser was young, the Belial family faced financial difficulties, but they managed to just scrape by. Under circumstances where it wouldn't have been surprising for his entire family to break apart, the two heads of the Belial House still continued to maintain their ideals.

"Take good care of your family and the citizens. As long as you strengthen the bonds between your relatives and protect the citizens' lives, the House of Belial and the Belial territory will continue to exist."

That was the ideal that his grandfather and father had always practiced. Hence, the family did not scatter from their small territory, they gathered together to prosper in a small community. Although their lives were more difficult than other aristocrats, if their entire family was gathered together, they were able to protect their territory and their citizens. Regardless of whether it was his grandfather, father or uncle, his relatives swore together that they would protect the Belial family and territory. Because of all that, the territory was not particularly prosperous, but there were almost no citizens who had difficult lives, and the tax system of the Belial territory was also praised. The amount of tax received from the citizens meant that their rank was considerably lower than that of other nobles, and that was also why the House of Belial was made fun of by some of the elite…. Although their own standards of living declined, the citizens were able to lead good lives—.

Diehauser — was proud of his grandfather and father who acted in this manner. As Devils, his grandfather and father didn't have particularly high levels of demonic energy, and weren't particularly good in battle, but even so, they were deeply appreciated by their own people, and they cherished their own people. Diehauser loved the Belial family and the Belial territory. Ever since Diehauser was young, he often saw his cousin and his family treated him and Cleria as true brothers and sisters in their upbringing. The other Seventy Two Pillars of the same generation — the extravagant lives of the children of other high-class Devils were no match for Diehauser, but Diehauser didn't seem to mind. It was during this time that Diehauser realised the extraordinary power within his body, and everyone else also recognised his incredible power. —Diehauser was a rare once-in-a-millennium talent and a Maou-class Devil. Afterwards, Diehauser participated in the Rating Games and obtained good results, and that instantly solved the Belial family's financial problems. Diehauser also began to spread self-promotions of his own, so that the specialties of

his territory could be sold throughout the Underworld. Thanks to the outstanding achievements of Diehauser, his cousin Cleria was also able to become independent from the family as she obtained her own peerage and set out into the human realm to develop herself. Diehauser was incredibly proud of his own success which allowed his family to have a future, and he became their pillar of support. He truly valued his family. This was something that was always rooted deep within Diehauser's heart. The fact that Cleria was able to go to the human realm was something that made him just as happy as his own circumstances. But a turning point came not long afterwards. News of Cleria's death arrived—.

Diehauser investigated the cause to find out who to direct his hatred at and to determine who to target; since someone had robbed the life of his most important family member, that was the person he would eliminate. It was because Diehauser was convinced that it was impossible for Cleria to have made any blunders. And then, his obsession eventually led him to find an answer. Cleria was eliminated because she found out about the existence of the [King] piece—. …But at the same time, he also understood. —The opportunity for Cleria to investigate the [King] piece was always something that had raised his doubts. …He had always used his innate ability to help his family. It was in order to prevent them from being ridiculed by other nobles, and to allow his family to lead happier lives. …His actions were all for the sake of the Belial family, but as a result, this led to her death, and Diehauser constantly blamed himself for that—. During the battle in Agreas, he heard from the Sekiryuutei — Hyoudou Issei, of the final expression that was left behind by Cleria's soul, and he felt as though some part of him was saved. But the crime that he had committed could not be erased. …He originally wanted to use his power to make his most valued family member happy. He once believed that this power was something that fate had gifted unto him. —But in the end, he brought trouble to his family and to other factions, and sacrifices were even made. …Diehauser intended to spend the rest of his life here quietly, and to slowly repent for his own sins. He would definitely cause trouble for someone if he went out again. If someone with immense strength misused their power, then that would only cause an unfortunate chain reaction. The news was being played in a corner of the single room. …The guard took good care of him and would tell him about news from the outside world. …The Rating Game World Tournament was being held in the world outside. Diehauser suddenly recalled something that the detective had said when he was interrogated.

[My son is going to turn nine this year. He's a big fan of yours. …Most children are looking forward to the Sekiryuutei who is the Oppai Dragon, or Prince Sairaorg who is known as the Lion King. But my son isn't interested in the Oppai Dragon or Lion King at all, he's only fascinated by you.]

The detective wore a complex expression on his face as he continued to speak proudly on the topic of his own son.

[Although what I'm saying may sound a little exaggerated, my son is very clever. He also has good grades at school, and he never forgets to study at home. The teachers at school also praise that 'he's a model student'. …My son always watches your recordings whenever he has free time. He watches each match over and over several times and when I ask him 'don't you get tired of it?', he tells me 'I won't get tired of it because the Champion is so cool'. His room is also filled with posters of you.]

The detective looked straight at Diehauser as he said

[As a detective, my son says things to me like ‘Please forgive the Champion’, and ‘The Champion wouldn’t do bad things like that’. …I’m someone who stands in a public position. I have to prosecute you for breaking the law and committing a crime. But from the perspective of that child, I’m a completely bad person.]

Diehauser then said

[…Please pass this on to your child. There are many other heroes out there who are better than I am. Most importantly, your father is one of them.]

The detective quietly shook his head.

[…Champion, those words are completely useless to that child. —To a boy, there are many heroes that they have, but their number one will never change. …This is something that my friend who is a former human reincarnated Devil told me.]

[……]

[It’s true to say that much. …I’m actually one of your fans as well. So though I’m quite disappointed, there’s nothing that can be done. I want to see more of your heroic figure in the upcoming World Tournament. I would like to see the most powerful player in the Underworld in an exciting game.]

—The World Tournament. If he hadn’t committed a crime, then he would be able to participate as a normal player—. When that idea surfaced in Diehauser’s mind, he shook his head.

…I can’t think about such things. As someone who has committed a crime, I can’t have any fantasies about such things. …I can no longer return to the Rating Games. After I’ve committed such crimes, how could anyone possibly look forward to my return….

In the single room, he was submersed in all kinds of thoughts. The Champion covered his own face. At that time, the guard appeared.

“Diehauser-dono, someone wishes to see you.”

As he stepped into the visiting room, the person waiting there for him was — a man who was roughly fifty years old. He was a man who appeared to resemble himself. …The current head of the House of Belial — his father. After seeing the father whom he had not seen in such a long time — he seemed to have become somewhat slimmer. Through the glass in the visiting room, his father delivered a hearty smile.

“Diehauser, I’m sorry for being so late in coming to visit you.”

“…Father.”

His father casually began the conversation.

“Have you been watching the Games?”

“…I haven’t been watching television…but I’ve still heard the news.”

“…The professional Devil players have been continuously defeated. Even the much-

anticipated newcomer, the Sekiryuutei was defeated by the Angel team a few days ago. As the makers of the Rating Games, we Devils have been defeated by various factions one after the other."

"…After all, there are players who are god-class beings, and there are also highly ranked players who have gone to assist other factions, so I don't consider Devils to be on the weaker side. …But…"

"…But?"

In response to his father's question, Diehauser shook his head.

"…Nothing, it's nothing."

Diehauser swallowed the phrase 'if it was me'. These were words that he was not allowed to speak. As someone who had committed a crime, he didn't have the right to speak such words—. He still longed for it, and this was something that he realised. Diehauser also realised that his father had also come to understand his yearning in just that brief exchange of words.

"…Is mother well?"

The current head of the House of Belial nodded in response to Diehauser's question.

"Yeah, she's doing just fine. I originally wanted to bring your mother along today…but only one person is allowed to visit. So I let her stay at home."

"…To mother, I must be an unfilial son. Even at first she opposed my participation in the Rating Games."

Diehauser's mother didn't feel pleased about his participation in the Rating Games. No matter what he did, his mother still refused to come watch his games. But that didn't mean that his mother hated him. The current head said

"…I've already said this many times, you don't have to mind about the Rating Games. Your mother simply does not wish to see you fighting. Your mother is afraid of her only son being in a fight. Even though it's practically impossible for you to lose…. But even so, your mother doesn't want to see you get hurt. But I watch your mother's share as well, so it's okay."

Deihauser apologised to his father

"…You've obviously put in such effort, but I…can no longer compete in a game again. Father, you've done so much for me to allow me to participate in the games…"

For his sake, his father did as much as possible to allow him to receive a high standard of education. His father allowed him to receive education that was equivalent to those of the same generation from Houses that had produces Maous. At the same time, finances were difficult, and to the poor aristocrats of the Belial House, this was not an ordinary expenditure, but his father did his best to support him without causing trouble for the family. Diehauser had always known this. In order to continue paying his tuition fees, his father reduced the number of social outfits he kept, and mother also sold her valuable jewellery. This was an immense amount for nobility, and even the young Diehauser understood that. And so, when he won his

first Rating Game, he gifted the finest noble clothing to his parents. He never once thought that that would have been enough to repay all of the expectations that his parents had. Just the fact that his father was able to wear the finest noble clothing made Diehauser happy. Noticing this, the current head pulled on his sleeves and said

“Hahaha, these clothes…it’s a brand that even the Maou-samas often wear. Diehauser, the Belial House’s subjects, as well as all of the citizens are all thankful to you for allowing them to be seen by the outside world. There is no one in the Belial territory who would blame you.”

The current head of the House of Belial moved onto the main topic.

“I think you should get out of here.”

“—!”

Diehauser was speechless. His father continued

“Thanks to your fame and established relationships, through various channels, I want you to return to the Rating Games anew. I have also pleaded to the Maou Ajuka Beelzebub. This is something that I can do.”

As the current head spoke with an overbearing tone, he suddenly seemed to have remembered something as he said

“Ah, I can’t use the connection to the Great King side anymore.”

A puzzled expression emerged on Diehauser’s face. His father had joined the Great King faction in the past, and his own status in the Underworld had continued to climb, and that gave his father a similarly high position.

Father said it can’t be used anymore…?

The current head answered his doubts.

“No, it’s nothing. I just went to the First Generation Bael-sama to ask a few things about you and Cleria. Hahaha, well, what should I say. In the end, I couldn’t hold back and I ended up hitting that First Generation old man. So that’s why I can’t use my connection to the Great King faction. I’m sorry, your father is still immature.”

His father laughed boldly. …In a sense, the First Generation Bael could be considered to be an authoritative figure even higher than the Maou's in the entire Underworld and for all Devils, a secret dictator. His father actually hit him…. Diehauser understood. His father truly cherished his family, and after learning the truth behind his and Cleria’s circumstances, he must have attacked the First Generation Bael. His father’s actions evoked a certain emotion in Diehauser’s heart.

“That’s what happened, so I’m now in the care of Beelzebub-sama’s faction.”

“H-How could I possibly allow father to deal with this alone…!”

He could no longer allow his father and his people to be troubled by his own problems. However, his father looked up at the ceiling and said

“Calfa…as of late, your mother has constantly been watching video recordings of

your matches. It's a bit ironic. You've already been locked up here, and she's been watching as if she's looking back on the path that her son has walked."

—*What.*

…His mother was watching…his matches. His mother had always avoided it, but she was now watching his games. The current head continued

"Seeing your mother like that, I also made up my mind. No matter what happens, and regardless of what I need to do, I want to send you onto the Tournament's stage. Don't worry, as long as you and the family are fine, I'll even start over back at that house deep in the mountains. Hahaha, after all, I've long been accustomed to the lifestyle of being a poor noble. Ah, if I say that, I'll be scolded by my ancestors."

In that instant, Diehauser's heartfelt feelings poured out as he could no longer restrain them. His tears flowed down without stopping. His father showed a gentle smile.

"I want to see you fighting in the World Tournament. …Your fans are also looking forward to it. Their voices have been reaching me every day. If Diehauser was there, it definitely wouldn't be the same. As long as the Champion is there, the Devils will fight better. As long as it's the Emperor Belial, he'll be able to defeat them no matter which team it is. Everyone has been shouting out loudly or begging for this. In any case, they all wish for you to get out of here. There are so many people looking forward to you."

His father thumped his own chest as he faced Diehauser, and said to his son

"I have neither talent nor merit, but I am your father. —So, I want to protect my son's honour."

With his face covered in tears, the Champion could only cry. He expressed his gratefulness to his mother and father, to his citizens and his fans.

"……Father, I…I…!"

The Champion loved the Rating Games.

"The Sekiryuutei's mother who once slapped you…must be a far better parent than I am. I…couldn't get angry at you."

—The Champion loved the Rating Games more than anyone else as it had acknowledged his existence.

"Diehauser, let's repay your crime together. The House of Belial will not abandon you. So, I also hope that you won't cast aside your own possibilities, as well as the hopes of the fans that are waiting for you—"

Diehauser suddenly recalled that at some point, his cousin Cleria had said to him

[Diehauser-niisama, I really admire the way you look when you're competing, it's really cool. You're the pride of me and the Belial family.]

…Cleria, will you also watch over my battles from afar? Can I fight as the Champion that you, father, mother and my fans admire?

—*The Champion will return.*

“—The Champion of the Rating Games, Emperor Belial, will you allow us, your admirers to see your heroic figure once again?”

—*The Champion will return!*

“……Yes, father…!”

In Diehauser’s eyes, in the eyes of Emperor Belial, a fire was ignited again.

—*The strongest Champion will return!*

This news immediately spread like a wildfire in the Underworld.

—*Emperor Belial’s shocking participation in the Rating Game World Tournament!*

Diehauser had been released on a temporary basis under the conditions of strict limitations on movement and surveillance.

Rias Gremory and Vali Lucifer would clash in the preliminaries, while Hyoudou Issei would also encounter a god-class opponent for the first time in the Rating Game World Tournament. The difference in combat strength — was far too obvious. Even if it was the Sekiryuutei, if faced with the team of the legendary monster Typhon, and the second generation chief gods of Olympus and Asgard, it was probably impossible for him to win. But through this game, the entire world would attain a new understanding of the [Welsh Dragon]—. And with this, the preliminaries finally came to an end, while a fierce battle in the final tournament began.

Vidar & Apollon

“Vidar, have you seen the new tournament combinations?”

“Oh, Apollon? Of course I’ve seen them.”

“After all, all of the gods who control fate among the mythologies have been secretly manipulating the tournament.”

“Well, it’s understandable that you have such ideas…but I don’t think the God of Destruction is the type to do such inconsiderate things. However, it isn’t harmful. As gods, it isn’t a bad thing for us to occasionally dance with fate.”

“Well, from your perspective as the [Fenrir Eater], what are your thoughts on this combination?”

“Don’t call me by that name. I’ve never had any interest in eating wolves. …But, I did believe that I would one day encounter him because of politics or other matters. So it’s not a bad thing to have an early battle against him. I feel a bit bad for stepbrother[1], but this is fate.”

“Well, we should get in touch with Typhon then. It would be best to hold a strategy meeting earlier.”

“It’s truly something to look forward to. As comrades who have been forced to take up the next generation, this should let us make a bit of a rumble, right? —Hey, [High School DxD][2]. I’ll be treating you the same as a god-class enemy.”

Notes

1. Alternate reading was Vali.
2. Alternate Reading was Sekiryuutei of Kuoh Academy.

Team member

Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth
Registered members

King	---	Hyoudou Issei
Queen	---	Bina Lessthan (Grayfia Lucifugus)
Rook	---	Rossweisse (sometimes Bishop)
Rook	---	No regular member has been registered
Knight	---	Xenovia Quarta
Knight	---	Shidou Irina
Bishop	---	Asia Argento
Bishop	---	Ravel Phoenix (sometimes Pawn)
Pawn [3]	---	Bova Tannin (sometimes Rook)
Pawn [5]	---	Nakiri Kouchin Ouryuu (sometimes Rook)
Alternate (Pawn [2] equivalent)	---	Elmenhilde Karnstein
??	---	Roygun Belphegor

Rias Gremory
Registered members

King	---	Rias Gremory
Queen	---	Himejima Akeno
Rook	---	Toujou Koneko

Rook	---	Vasco Strada
Knight	---	Kiba Yuuto
Knight	---	Lint Sellzan
Bishop	---	Gasper Vladi
Bishop	---	Valerie Tepes
Pawn [8]	---	Mr. Black (Crom Cruach)

Nether world

In the lowest level of Hell — the Ice Hell, Cocytus. Those who committed the gravest sins or perhaps those who perpetrated betrayals were eternally bound here in the cruellest depths of Hell. In this Ice Hell — the God of the Netherworld Hades summoned all of his servants and Grim Reapers. What they saw there was — a research institute for the supernatural that was a complete mismatch for Cocytus. The research institute was located in the depths of an icy valley. After the two heavy doors swung open, Hades led the high-ranking Grim Reapers into the research institute. The inside had long been empty, and there was no indication of anything. Indeed, this was originally Qlippoth's — Rizevim Livan Lucifer's research institute, one of his hidden locations. Using the information that he had gained in advance, Hades solved the secret of the doors which connected each level one by one. After moving through around a dozen doors, they arrived at a place that was rather forbidding, a place that seemed to have something important concealed. That thing was now in front of Hades and the Grim Reapers. The floor space of the entire level was encompassed by a large culture tank. That thing was inside. Inside the culture tank—. After seeing that thing, although usually calm — the Grim Reapers that could be described as cold and cruel were all dismayed as they shouted

<<Hades-sama, this is…!>>

Hades — revealed a wide smile.

<<…When I received news that the Evil Dragon Apophis wanted to send me a 'gift', I still had some doubts…fafafa, it seems like you were truly hated, Prince Rizevim.>>

<<In other words, could that be…?>>

Hades and the Grim Reapers looked into the enormous culture tank, at a mass of ugly flesh that was within. There was nothing that resembled a living being, it was simply left there, an ugly piece of flesh that made one shudder. However, that piece of flesh — was connected by pipes to numerous machines that pounded as they pulsated. That thing was alive in such a form—. Hades looked at the thing as he said

<<—Correct, that is the wife of the Devil King Lucifer, the Mother of Devils. — Lilith.>>

Indeed, Hades called that ugly mass of flesh the Mother of Devils. Lilith — Rizevim had kept Lilith hidden up until the very end. Even if he died, it was still kept hidden. However, due to Apophis' betrayal, this thing was eventually made known to Hades. No, Rizevim wouldn't have allowed Apophis to learn of the existence of this thing. — But, he underestimated that Evil Dragon and allowed that Evil Dragon to find it. Hades stood in front of Lilith and spread open his arms.

<<…In this short year, various mythological events have occurred — the rebellion of the Old Maou's bloodline, the upheaval of the successors of Heroic souls, the extraordinary naiveté of the Maou Lucifer's son, as well as the destruction of the legendary Evil Dragons and the Beast of the Apocalypse. Far too abnormal and strange events have occurred one after the other. What is at the centre of all this?>>

The holes in his eyes gleamed strangely, and Hades continued

<<It is the Sacred Gears, the Longinus. —But, the one driving and resolving this series of events were Devils and yet Dragons, Dragons and yet Devils, the faction of Dragons led by the Maou. The act of inviting the invaders from another world into this world is also because of their existence. Because of their existence, this chain of anomalies will continue. Hence, so that I can protect the Netherworld and our mythology, we must bury them.>>

The information on the other world [ExE] ' ' ' was another report that Apophis had given away. After receiving information on Lilith and the other world, Hades ignited the last signal fire—. Hades gave orders to the Grim Reapers.

<<To my comrades, all Grim Reapers and the God of the Abyss Tartarus, tell this to the Kings of each Hell. —It is time to drive out the true 'enemy'.>>

<<<<<<<<Yes!>>>>>>>>

The Grim Reapers responded to their master and instantly dispersed from there. Left alone, Hades looked up at the flesh — Lilith.

<<…We alone are enough to stand in front of the invaders from another world.>>

The final battle in which reconciliation was absolutely impossible was also approaching—.

Notes

1. Alternate reading was Evie Etoulde.

Afterword

This is the second volume of the final arc. Hello, this is Ishibumi Ichiei.

The story this time was centred on Asia, Xenovia, and Irina and their future promises with Issei. I think that some descriptions are still inadequate, but please continue to pay attention to their relationship with Issei from now on. Well, although this is the final arc, this is similar to volume twenty two in maintaining the initial feeling of DxD, and the remainder of the final arc will be written in a similar fashion. Next is a commentary on volume twenty three.

[King] — the growth of the high-class Devil Issei and the President of the Occult Research Club Asia

This time, rather than fighting, there was more focus on youth in sports. So far, I've always written about Issei's physical growth, so I've focused on the mental aspect this time and described his growth as a senior high school student. While planning the final arc, I had already decided to have Issei lose one time, but in that regard, a plain loss would have been meaningless. So the development of the story involved the mental growth of both Issei and Asia, as well as their future development.

A year ago, Issei tasted defeat in a game and felt disappointment after facing a formidable opponent. A year later, facing those who have experienced the same defeat, he understood the disappointment of his junior and subordinate, so Issei said something that Rias and Azazel normally would have said, and this allows readers to feel his growth.

[Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team, about the new members

First is Elmenhilde. Because I had long wanted a vampire girl who liked Issei to be in the group, I spent a long time but I've finally written it. From now on, please take care of Elme!

Next is Nakiri Kouchin Ouryuu. In reality, he and Millarca use their phones (which should now be smartphones) as the male and female protagonists in Ajuka's 'Game' (Ajuka and Tiamat are also important characters). But the related setting is still not in perfect shape, so their characters have appeared in DxD first. Nakiri and Millarca's story will be published in the future. Of course, Issei and the others will also appear. Please patiently wait. He is not the protagonist in DxD, but a supporting character who respects Issei from the bottom of his heart.

Bina and Mr. Black's true identities, as well as the addition of Roygun and His Eminence into the battle!

First off, the true identities of the [Queen] of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team Bina Lessthan and the [Pawn] of Rias' team Mr. Black have finally been revealed. I'm sure some readers would have guessed it already. There are still many mysteries surrounding Grayfia's actions. They will be explained one by one in the future. Secondly, Strada has joined Rias' team. Because he was too strong, I didn't originally intend to have him re-appear in the main volumes…but it would actually seem unnatural if he didn't participate when there were god-class beings participating in this exciting tournament, so I decided to let him join. Last is Roygun Belphegor who approached Issei because she wanted to become his vassal. Issei is beginning to become surrounded by onee-samas filled with charm like Grayfia, Tiamat, and Roygun.

[Trump Card of Heaven] team, regarding Dulio and Rudiger Rosenkreutz

This time, I was finally able to introduce the Aces of the reincarnated Angels. Aside from Irina, the group of three Aces will occasionally show their faces in the future.

—The players of Dulio's team didn't fall despite seeing uniforms being ripped apart, they are powerful warriors who have undergone strict training, so although they are troubled by it, it is very difficult for them to actually fall. Irina…perhaps she still needs a lot of training.

Appearing as the supervisor, Rudiger had already appeared once as the referee during the battle between Gremory and Bael in volume ten. He has always been a frequent topic of discussion ever since his debut. I was finally able to complete his introduction this time.

As for the Rating Games, I think there are still many contradictions and loopholes because I wrote very energetically, so I would be grateful if readers don't mind the details too much.

Acknowledgements and future developments!

Next are my acknowledgements. Miyama-zero-sama, Editor T-sama, I've been in your care every time! The upcoming twenty fourth volume is the final volume of the Tournament's preliminaries. There are terrifying groupings like Rias' team VS Vali's team, and Issei's team VS the Next Generation Chief God's Alliance team! After these two games conclude, the Tournament will officially move into the final knockout competition.

The next book to be released is volume twenty four…I really want to say that, but it will be DX4. But, volume DX4 which will be on sale next is a special new story as it will involve the 'Sairaorg team VS Cao Cao team' chapter as well as the 'Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth team VS Sitri team' chapter, two particularly special chapters!

The events occur in between volume twenty three, so it could in fact be considered to be volume 23.5. This will not be a youth sports volume, but one in which hot-blooded battles are the main theme. It will be a confrontation of power and technique as well as a showdown between the old and new Student Council. —Of course, if it was only about battles, then it would be a bit monotonous, so if there is still room, the usual flirtatious day-to-day life of DX will also be included. Although it is part of the

DX series, volume DX4 can also be seen as part of the main series, so please stay tuned!

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